United Nations S/PV.7466

Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7466th meeting
Thursday, 18 June 2015, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Dato Sri Aman/Mrs. Adnin	(Malaysia)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Chad	Mr. Mangaral
	Chile	Mr. Barros Melet
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Jordan	Mr. Hmoud
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Spain	Mr. Ibañez
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

Children and armed conflict

Letter dated 1 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2015/402)

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

15-18380 (E)

Accessible document Please recycle

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Children and armed conflict

Letter dated 1 June 2015 from the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (S/2015/402)

Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409)

The President: I wish to warmly welcome the Secretary-General, Ministers and other representatives present in the Security Council Chamber. Their participation is an affirmation of the importance of the subject matter under discussion.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Colombia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Mexico, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay, Viet Nam and Zimbabwe to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF; and Ms. Eunice Apio, Director of Facilitation for Peace and Development.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following persons to participate in this meeting: His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations; and His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Fathalla, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of Palestine to the United Nations to participate in the meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I propose that the Council invite the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See to the United Nations to participate in this meeting, in accordance with the provisional rules of procedure and the previous practice in this regard.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/409, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

I also wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/402, which contains the text of a letter dated 1 June 2015 from the Permanent Representatives of Malaysia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, transmitting a concept note on the item under consideration.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The Secretary-General: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, His Excellency Dato Sri Anifah Aman, for arranging this critical debate on children and armed conflict.

The past year was one of the worst in recent memory for children in countries affected by conflict. My report (S/2015/409) before the Council outlines the enormous challenges we face in upholding the fundamental rights of tens of millions of children. We have seen crises multiply and intensify, making protection more and more difficult. Grave violations against children have been an affront to our common humanity in the Central African Republic, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

I am also deeply alarmed at the suffering of so many children as a result of the Israeli military operations in Gaza last year. I urge Israel to take concrete and immediate steps, including by reviewing existing policies and practices, to protect and prevent the killing

and maiming of children and to respect the special protections afforded to schools and hospitals.

Around the world, many thousands of children have experienced acts that no child should suffer. They have been killed, maimed, forcibly recruited, tortured and sexually abused. Their schools have been destroyed. And in a worrying trend, abductions have increased rapidly. Groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army have been kidnapping children for many years, but the scale and nature of that grave violation is changing. Abduction is now being used as a tactic to terrorize or target particular ethnic groups or religious communities, and children have been a particular focus. The large number of abductions by Daesh and Boko Haram has shocked us repeatedly in recent months. But we should also recognize that the practice is prevalent in many other situations covered by the report and is perpetrated by a great range of other non-State armed groups. I am pleased that at the last open debate on children and armed conflict, in March (see S/PV.7414), there was broad support from Member States to address the challenge and increase the tools available to deal with it.

Next month, we will mark the tenth anniversary of the Council's resolution 1612 (2005), which established the monitoring and reporting mechanism on the recruitment and use of child soldiers. My Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and her predecessors have made great strides in protecting children from recruitment. The "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign is based on many years of work to change attitudes. This year has witnessed further progress. We are moving ever closer towards a world in which no child wears a Government uniform and engages in combat. I encourage those concerned Governments represented in the Chamber today to redouble their efforts to implement the goals of the campaign and to work with my Special Representative. However, there is still much to do in addressing the challenge of ending grave violations against children by non-State armed groups.

The report before the Council highlights some progress made in that regard. For example, the release of 1,757 children from the Cobra Faction is a bright spot in an otherwise bleak picture in South Sudan. My Special Representative will continue to work with such groups to ensure that we are doing our utmost to protect children in these most difficult environments.

Grave violations against children are of great concern both in countries of origin and in countries to which children flee. Children may cross the border to flee conflict, but that does not mean that they are safe from its effects. They require urgent and sustained protection interventions.

I regret that the contents of my annual report this year on children and armed conflict have been the subject of more controversy and discussions than usual, to the extent of threatening its integrity. The mechanism has withstood scrutiny, and the content of my report should speak for itself. It represents a strong overview of egregious violations suffered by children in conflict in 2014. It increases global awareness, highlights the need for accountability and calls for action. It is a stark reminder that the protection of children in armed conflict must be our common priority.

A healthy debate in which Member States put forward their views and provide information is appropriate. But national interests should not cloud the objective at stake — protecting children, which is a moral imperative and a legal obligation. Those who engage in military action that results in numerous grave violations against children will, regardless of intent, find themselves under scrutiny. Member States should pursue all avenues to protect children affected by armed conflict. One important way is by ending impunity for the violations outlined in the report.

I also wish to reassure everyone that I am committed to ensuring that the United Nations itself does more and better to prevent any abuse of children in the context of conflict. Recent allegations concerning abuse in the Central African Republic make that all the more essential. I urge Member States, and in particular all the parties to conflict identified in the report, to work with my Special Representative to prevent future grave violations against children. Children have the right to be protected in their schools, in their homes, in their communities. Let us keep the rights of children at the centre of our efforts to build a future of dignity for all.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Zerrougui.

Ms. Zerrougui: I would first like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia for organizing this debate on children and armed conflict. Today's debate builds on the important

discussion we had on 25 March (see S/PV.7414), presided over by France, dedicated to child victims of non-State armed groups.

As the Secretary-General has just stated, 2014 was a devastating year for children living in conflict areas. A number of conflicts intensified in 2015, imposing terrible short- and long-term consequences on many children caught up in the violence.

An estimated 230 million children now live in countries and areas affected by conflict. More than 5 million refugee children have also been forced to flee from countries where the monitoring and reporting mechanism is in place. Appalling impacts on the welfare of children were felt especially in Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan, the State of Palestine, Syria and Yemen. The report before the Council (S/2015/409) documents sharp increases in the numbers of children killed in 2014, and an equally shocking number of injured. That should not just shock us, it is a call to action to all of us. I will use the opportunity today to outline the challenges as I see them and ways in which we can address obstacles and assist these children.

First, violent extremist groups and their horrific crimes captured much of the world's attention in 2014. We saw children forced to become suicide bombers and human shields, and we saw the public execution of many others. Others were required to witness and actively participate in public acts of brutality. We note that responses to the threat posed by extreme violence, by both militia groups and in some cases Government forces, have also raised child protection concerns. I am gratified to see that the Council routinely calls on States to ensure that measures taken to counter these group comply with all their obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law and refugee and humanitarian law.

As the Secretary-General mentions in his report, the abduction of children in large numbers was a growing and prevalent feature of conflict in 2014. The response to abductions needs to be scaled up to address this increasing trend, including through early-warning mechanisms. I echo the Secretary-General's call in his report to expand the tools available to address this important issue, including adding abduction as a trigger violation for listing a party in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report. We must also tailor integration programmes for those who undergo the traumatizing experience of abduction and associated violence and ensure that international support is there to fund these programmes.

As discussed extensively at the open debate in March (see S/PV.7414), engagement with non-State armed groups is another vital area of focus to improve the situation of children in conflict. The majority of the parties in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report are non-State armed groups, and I have been working to engage a wide range of these groups to secure commitments to stop violations and protect children. As the Secretary-General's report notes, in the Central African Republic I supported efforts of the United Nations mediation team to include child protection provisions in the Brazzaville ceasefire agreement, signed in July of last year. This progress was further consolidated in the context of the Bangui Forum in May of this year. Following a commitment signed by 10 armed groups on the margins of the Forum, more than 300 children have been released from the anti-Balaka and the ex-Séléka, and thousands more are expected to be released in the coming months. This is another reminder of the significant resources needed to appropriately receive and reintegrate such a large number of children.

More recently, at the invitation of the Government of Colombia, I met in Cuba in May with a delegation of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejercito del Pueblo (FARC-EP). They were open to discussing international standards and ways in which they could make progress to ensure the protection of children. In that connection, I welcome the announcement made earlier this week regarding the release of children under the age of 15, and I look forward to seeing further progress to ensure the separation of all children.

Later in May, I met with the leaders of three armed groups from Darfur to stress the importance of child protection. I am pleased to report that following this meeting, they issued a joint statement on the situation of children in Darfur, pledging to reinforce efforts to prevent grave violations against children.

This concerted engagement also requires the support of Member States to help facilitate contact with these groups and allow independent access so that discussions can be held. It is in the interests of all involved that these groups be brought into a process that will expedite the end of violations against children and prevent future ones.

As Council members know, last ye r we launched the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. I am pleased to report that we continue to make progress towards ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children by national security forces by 2016. We saw important steps taken in 2014 in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. One can see in the Secretary-General's report that just one case of recruitment by Government forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was documented in 2014, and we have not received any reports so far in 2015. That represents tangible progress as compared to the situation just a few years ago. I will soon travel to Myanmar to support the Government and the United Nations country team in their efforts to intensify and implement priorities in their joint action plan.

While progress is indeed being made with several Ccmpaign countries, sadly, the crises in South Sudan and Yemen have severely hampered our efforts in those countries. Solid progress had been made, but has now been largely lost.

From South Sudan, I am receiving testimony that children — some as young as four months old — are being targeted in Unity state based on their ethnicity. Eyewitnesses and survivors said that boys were killed and civilians thrown into burning houses. In one instance, young boys who did not manage to escape an attack on their village were reportedly tied together with one rope and their throats were slit. Girls are also being subjected to rape by both individuals and groups. Those alarming reports were just received, and those acts have occurred within the last six weeks. Such heinous crimes fly in the face of the numerous commitments by all parties in South Sudan to stop violations against children. As the Council knows, the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict adopted strong conclusions on South Sudan in May. Unfortunately, these actions seem to have little or no impact on stopping ongoing violations. More must be done, and I call on the international community, especially the African Union and Security Council members, to take concerted action to protect these children, who have grown up surrounded by violence and insecurity.

Yemen is also in our thoughts daily, as we watch the violence in the media and receive reports of children being killed in aerial bombings, and of many others being recruited. Since late March, as UNICEF reported a few weeks ago, at least 135 children have been killed and 260 injured. The fighting has destroyed schools and hospitals. Cases of recruitment of children and their use in conflict have also risen dramatically, with all parties to the conflict on the ground recruiting children in large numbers.

Another issue that has recently been a focus in the field, as the Secretary-General mentioned a moment ago, is the sexual abuse and exploitation of children by peacekeepers or foreign troops. Sexual abuse committed by those entrusted with protecting a population is particularly egregious. It is our collective responsibility to do our utmost to prevent such behaviour and to ensure that the perpetrators are held accountable in all contexts.

The issue of deprivation of liberty is another concern, with security forces detaining children for their actual or alleged association with armed groups. It is equally worrying that children are being treated primarily as security threats rather than as victims. My Office has been working with its partners to ensure that protocols are in place to ensure that detained children are handed over to child protection actors as soon as possible, and these efforts have borne fruit. In 2014, agreements for the handover of children to child protection actors were reached with the Governments of Chad and Somalia. Child-protection provisions were also included in the concept of operations of the Multinational Joint Task Force established to fight Boko Haram. Despite such progress, however, we continue to receive disturbing reports of large numbers of children being detained, particularly in the context of counter-terrorism operations.

The rise in the number and gravity of recent crises has tested both our resolve and our ability to respond. The most important element of our response will be to redouble our efforts and address new challenges with new tools. I would remind the Governments concerned that they continue to bear the primary responsibility for the protection of the children within their borders and that they must actively address the violations outlined in the Secretary-General's report. The fight against impunity remains one of the key aspects of our efforts not only to react to, but also to prevent grave violations against children. Without credible accountability, the violations will not stop. I call on all States to comply with their international legal obligations and to review their policies and practices to ensure that children are protected and their rights respected.

Lastly, we must all answer this call to action. The stakes are high. An entire generation of children is

depending on us to be their voice, to tell their story and, most of all, to take action. My Office stands ready to engage with any party to conflict that appears in the Secretary-General's report.

The President: I thank Ms. Zerrougui for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Brandt.

Ms. Brandt: Let me, at the outset, thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia for organizing this debate, the Secretary-General for his leadership and Ms. Leila Zerrougui, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, for her tireless commitment to keeping children in conflict safe.

In January this year, in Borno state, Nigeria, villages were attacked by armed groups. Houses and schools were burned. Fatima, a young mother, fled with her baby and two young sons. Stopped by gunmen, she was forced to answer questions about her husband and her religious beliefs. Eventually, the gunmen let her go, but ordered her to leave behind her sons, aged three and seven. She walked for weeks with her daughter until she reached a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs). She has no idea of what has happened to her sons, or whether she will ever see them again. This is frightening, devastating and increasingly common.

The past year, as the Secretary General's report (S/2015/409) documents and as his Special Representative mentioned earlier, was one of the worst ever for children affected by armed conflict, not least because of the alarming rise in abductions, especially mass abductions, of children and adults in Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan and Syria.

We have seen mass abductions before, and the Secretary-General has just mentioned the Lord's Resistance Army, which abducted children by night, prompting thousands to make the dangerous nightly journey to areas beyond its reach. In fact, we will have the honour to hear more on this from Ms. Eunice Apio later. The scale and nature of abductions is changing, however, and the Secretary-General's report gives several examples of this.

Used to instil fear and terror in populations, abduction is often only the first in a series of grave violations. Sexual assault and rape, indoctrination, recruitment as child soldiers and murder often follow. Each of these offences blights the child concerned, robs her of her childhood and threatens her ability to live a full and productive life. Each offence violates international law. It both shames us for not doing more to prevent atrocities and spurs us to act to prevent all violations of child rights and call for increased accountability. Left unaddressed, each offence can contribute to the recurring cycles of violence and conflict that shatter lives and communities and perpetuate conflict in future generations. We therefore welcome the Security Council's particular attention this morning to abduction as a new trigger for the listing of parties to conflict in the annexes of the Secretary-General's report.

Let us also acknowledge the progress we have made together to release and reintegrate children affected by conflict. The Secretary-General and his Special Representative mentioned the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which has been central to that shared progress. Combined efforts also led to the release earlier this year of more than 2,000 children by non-State armed groups, including in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. I would like to take this opportunity to thank France for organizing a debate specifically focused on child victims of such groups earlier this year (see S/PV.7414).

We cannot, and must not, stop at the release of children, however. We must also think about what happens after children are released. How can they resume normal life when they are inevitably burdened by physical wounds and psychological scars? Think of Fatima's young sons. How will they cope when they return to their mother? Think of the trauma endured by the young women and girls who have escaped from Boko Haram. Think of the more than 140 Kurdish boys abducted by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant last year. These children are victims and must be treated as such. When they are released, the best option is to transfer them quickly to child protection services, to trained professionals who can support them as they recover, rebuild and reintegrate, and who can address the needs of girls and children with special needs, including those with disabilities.

We must commit to providing that critical support, because without it children will not get the opportunity to heal, and the risk of re-recruitment is real. While we acknowledge that progress has been made in some areas, we must remain vigilant, because where conflict has re-emerged or escalated, the risks of backsliding are real. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General just spoke about South Sudan and Yemen,

where the use of children has not only continued but has increased in recent bouts of conflict.

Urgently and collectively, we must turn our attention to prevention. The best way to do that, of course, is to step up efforts to end conflict and to pursue accountability, not just as a means of addressing past wrongs but also of deterring future ones. But we must also engage those who are most affected by, for example, strengthening community protection measures by engaging local leaders and exploring the benefits of unarmed civilian protection, as well as by supporting the methods that families use to protect their children — including, in some cases, seeking safety and protection as refugees or IDPs.

Even as we tackle such challenges, new threats emerge. Children are at risk for new forms of violence promoted via social media. Aggressive forms of recruitment for extreme violence, such as participation in executions and suicide bombings, are real and reach well beyond conflict zones. And even in places where children should be safe, they are not. Think of the attack on a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, that killed 145 children and teachers. Or Gaza last year, where more than 260 schools were damaged or destroyed. Or the countries where Governments and non-State armed groups use schools to store weapons, detain prisoners and house soldiers. Or the continued use of explosive weapons and indiscriminate weapons, such as landmines and cluster bombs, in populated areas.

UNICEF therefore appreciates all the more Norway's leadership on the Safe Schools Declaration, which advocates for schools to be safe and protected spaces and outlines actions to end the military use of schools. We need more such initiatives, including negotiations to release children held by armed groups, and community-based reintegration programmes to help children not only recover and reintegrate but also learn new skills to build for the future. Such efforts show children and their families that we care, that we are committed to their protection and well-being and that we cannot and will not tolerate grave violations against children in armed conflict by anyone, anywhere.

We have failed Fatima. We can only imagine the heartbreak that she and her children endure daily. And we do not know if they will ever be reunited. We hope so, of course. Fatima told out staff in the IDP camp that she has not given up hope. And neither can we. We must let her courage inspire us to work even harder. Fatima's children, and thousands of others, depend on us.

The President: I thank Ms. Brandt for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Apio.

Ms. Apio: On behalf of my organization, Facilitation for Peace and Development, in collaboration with the Centre for Family and Human Rights, I would like to thank the Malaysian presidency for the invitation to address the Security Council in today's open debate. Ours is a typical grassroots organization, and our work contributes to improving respect for people's rights and promoting sustainable livelihoods. Our participation here today is an illustration of how even-handed the Council can be in fulfilling its mandate.

In my statement I will focus particularly on the challenges that continue to face individuals, and their families and communities, affected by abduction and other activities perpetrated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda. I do this in the hope that the information may inform further interventions in northern Uganda, but also, and more important, that it may influence efforts to achieve disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) in zones of war and armed conflict where children still remain extremely vulnerable to abduction and recruitment by insurgent groups.

Between 1986 and 2008, Ugandans, in particular children in northern Uganda, had experiences very comparable to what other children are now experiencing in war and conflict zones, and their impact is still visible today. Of the more than 65,000 civilians who were abducted by the LRA, at least 53 per cent were children, some as young as nine years old. They became forced labourers in the LRA. In addition to soldiering, girls were subjected to systematic rape and sexual violence, which among other things resulted in exposure to sexually transmitted diseases and the birth of thousands of children. Many of those abducted children were killed or maimed during the course of the war, and many still remain unaccounted for. Those who returned were shadows of themselves, broken in body and spirit, just like the families and communities they had left behind, most of whom lived for many years in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and in deplorable living conditions. But others came back to no family at all.

For years, those communities lost their entire livelihoods, and those who could be reached later had to survive on food and non-food items distributed mostly by the World Food Programme and its partners, for which we remain grateful. As happens during most wars, all of the region's infrastructure, including schools, health centres and roads, broke down and ceased to function. All of those things became priorities that competed with the need for direct support to the psycho-social well-being of the children and their families. Their lives have never been the same again.

We should not downplay the fact that the DDR efforts were often fragmented, uncoordinated, experimental and even incomplete — understandably, since we had very little to learn from. While they met many children's emergency and short-term needs — keeping them alive and relatively safe from often enraged and desperate civilians and from looming rejection by their families — those efforts were not a foolproof solution to the long-term effects of war on the children and their families and communities. What was done in the name of reintegration consisted mainly of transferring individuals from point A to point B. Most children moved directly from the LRA to squalid IDP camps. Some, but not all, received basic counselling at reception centres in between.

Years after the war, the northern region has the highest rate of mental-health-related illnesses in the country, with soaring rates of suicides and alcohol and substance abuse. It has even affected some of the economic and social rehabilitation efforts. Between July 2012 and June 2013, in Gulu hospital, in the north, alone 10,736 psychiatric cases with severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression were documented, an average of 75 cases a day.

Actors in other war zones can learn from us and act early to ensure that individuals and families, along with returning children, receive adequate psychological support. In our context, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, among other afflictions, are widespread and speak to the need to integrate mental health into primary health care. To cite a recent illustrative case, in 1991, at the age of just nine years, a boy I will call Omona was forced to burn down his house while his parents and two brothers were trapped inside. Shortly after that, as they made their way into the bushes, the group leader ordered him to kill his own brothers for trying to escape. He defected from the LRA in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2012, and returned to his home with his partner, who was also a former child soldier, and their three children. Sometimes he and his wife have subjected their children to severe beatings and chased them away to live on the streets in Gulu. The entire family has been diagnosed with severe post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

The reintegration of such children has been made more difficult because the receiving communities also suffered the effects of war and trauma. For example, in November 2013, a 58 year-old woman, whom I will call Akelo, was referred to us by a mental-health clinic in Gulu hospital to help her sort out a land-dispute case. I am recounting her story because it is typical of the general population into which ex-combatant children return. In 1996, the LRA raided her compound and cut off her husband's head, ordering her to laugh as she carried it around. At the same time, they killed her son and his family and ordered her to bury the bodies. Now a widow and without a son, her brothers-in-law have ordered her to leave their land under threat of death. They then razed her house to the ground. It was then that she began fearing the setting of the sun, because, she explained, her nights were haunted by thoughts of having had to carry the head of her husband and watch her son and his family killed all over again.

The point here is that, although attention has been accorded to the psychological wounds that children have faced, however short-term, we have largely not addressed those of people like Akelo, who may not have been abducted but still bear the brunt of the war. Yet we have expected people like Akelo, who made up the majority in the communities, to embrace and support the reintegration of formerly abducted children like Omona.

The region is also experiencing extremely high incidences of land conflicts, often leading to violent behaviour and the victimization of children and women, and triggering severe symptoms of mental-health illnesses. As a matter of concern, we have also not extended adequate support for demobilizing and reintegrating IDPs, so that they could come to terms with their experiences and make a more organized resettlement, while protecting the most vulnerable like Akelo. In the process, war orphans, especially those who had been born in IDP camps, found it difficult to identify or even claim their parents' old land. I would like also to draw the attention of the Council to the fact that female ex-combatants who had children found it extremely difficult to re-integrate if their children born

of war could not integrate, mainly owing to stigma and discrimination.

We also note with concern that, besides recruiting children from mainstream society, groups like the LRA are now increasingly filling positions in their leadership hierarchy with children who were born in the group. As long as they remain in the LRA, those children are also susceptible to being perpetrators of the abduction of other children from mainstream society. They also remain likely to perpetuate sexual violence on other recruits, including on girls born in the group, thereby defeating the very purpose of our attempts to end the use of child soldiers and prevent sexualized violence in war.

We commend the Council for the strong statements and actions that, over the course of the years, have encouraged the fighters in the LRA to defect and embrace DDR. In order not to leave a segment of such groups behind, we suggest that the Council consider other innovative ways that might also appeal to children who are born in and are growing up in the system. While international covenants talk about the protection of all children affected by war, children conceived after sexual violence fall through the cracks in the protection framework. Those children, born of war, especially when older or left parentless in the group, may have no idea how to disassociate from the group.

I am also compelled to state here that I and other scholars within the International Network for Children Born of War — which has its hub at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom — are undertaking a series of studies to better understand the phenomenon of being born as a result of sexualized violence in war zones and how that might inform prospects for integration and reintegration across time and space. The contribution of civil society organizations like mine can be made more effective when Governments take the lead in DDR. The effects of armed conflict stay with children for a lifetime. We urge Governments to integrate DDR into long-term national development priorities.

The President: I thank Ms. Appio for her briefing.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2015/445, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Albania, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Chad, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Latvia, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Angola, Chad, Chile, China, France, Jordan, Lithuania, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Spain, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2225 (2015).

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.

Let me start by thanking Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his special remarks. I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui and to Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, for their briefings and valuable insights. Malaysia fully acknowledges and commends the vital and indispensable work of the United Nations in advocating for and providing assistance to children affected by armed conflict around the world. I furthermore wish to thank Ms. Eunice Apio of the Facilitation for Peace and Development of Uganda for her testimony on the consequences of child abduction, the effects of which are far-reaching and are felt long after conflict has ended.

Graça Machel, in her seminal 1996 report on the impact of armed conflict on children (A/51/306), advocated forcefully that the protection of children in armed conflict is the joint responsibility of all actors — Member States, international and regional organizations, civil society and even the lone individual, each playing their respective roles. It is that sense of shared responsibility that Malaysia appeals to

when calling for concerted action to end and alleviate the suffering of children harmed by warfare. This is especially so if we are to address challenges that require sustained attention and close collaboration.

The challenges are manifold. In Yemen, Iraq and Palestine, children are losing their lives as the result of air strikes and the use of explosive weapons in densely populated settings. Children in South Sudan and Somalia continue to be recruited in large numbers by armed groups and militias. Children abducted by violent extremist groups, such as Boko Haram and Daesh, are forced into sexual slavery and are coerced or brainwashed to inflict bloodshed, including as suicide bombers, combatants and executioners.

Those continued violations against children shock our collective consciousness and demand a concerted, collective response. The increasing incidence of abductions perpetrated primarily by non-State armed groups is grave and disturbing. Children who are abducted can be subjected to myriad further violations — they can be harmed multiple times. The use of abductions by violent extremist groups as a terror tactic against local communities and minorities is an acute concern that cannot be easily addressed using the available tools and mechanisms. That is why, in our view, the unanimous adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) today is important, as it underscores our unified stance in denouncing the abduction of children. Strengthening the monitoring and reporting on abductions, as well as identifying perpetrators, will further contribute to ensuring accountability. At the same time, we must also ensure that security forces and peacekeeping missions are trained and equipped to proactively respond to situations where children are at risk of abduction and other grave violations.

Ms. Apio illustrated in poignant detail the long-term consequences experienced by children, particularly girls, and communities impacted by abduction, underscoring the importance of ensuring that mechanisms and programmes are in place to facilitate the reintegration and rehabilitation of children victimized by armed groups back into their communities. We must also recognize that reintegration is a long-term effort that requires the collective responsibility of all stakeholders, including the international community. In that regard, community-based reintegration programmes that foster a spirit of unity and reconciliation among communities ravaged by war deserve to be fully supported.

We are equally alarmed by the increasing instances of attacks on schools and hospitals, as well as the military use of schools by both State and non-State armed groups, thereby depriving thousands of children of access to education and health care. Building on the Security Council's call, in resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014), for the protection of schools from attack and military use, I am pleased to announce Malaysia's endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration, adopted on 29 May in Oslo. We encourage all member States to consider endorsing that declaration, which aims, inter alia, to raise awareness on good practices that would deter the military use of educational facilities in armed conflict and preserve schools as mainstays of learning, not bloodshed.

The question of accountability cannot go unaddressed and is a vital component of a comprehensive approach to child protection. We urge for actions to be taken under national or international justice mechanisms, where appropriate, against parties that commit violations and abuses against children. We reaffirm the importance of the Security Council framework for children and armed conflict and the various tools that have been developed to ensure the accountability and compliance of parties to conflict, including through the listing mechanism of the annual report of the Secretary-General. We believe that facts should be the determining factor that guides our actions under this framework.

We are also dismayed that the credibility and integrity of the mechanism was questioned this year. During last year's 50-day war in Gaza, over 500 Palestinian children were killed and over 1,000 children suffered serious injuries causing permanent disabilities as a direct result of the Israeli attacks. Despite the fact that the number of Palestinian children killed was the third highest in the world, and the number of schools damaged or destroyed was the highest in the world in 2014, we have failed to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to account.

Impunity will only further embolden the perpetrators. When we start applying different standards to perpetrators and when we discriminate against those who deserve justice and accountability, we are in fact perpetuating grave violations, not only of children's rights but those of humankind in general.

On behalf of my delegation, I wish to express our heartfelt appreciation to all Council members and Member States that supported the resolution just adopted, including by sponsoring the text. We fervently

hope that the adoption of this resolution will serve to further strengthen our collective resolve to continue developing effective strategies and responses for the protection of children in armed conflict, even in the face of unprecedented challenges. The future of our nations and of the world rests upon the shoulders of the children that we secure, protect and nurture today.

As a non-permanent member of the Council and Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, as well as a responsible member of the international community, Malaysia reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that children affected by armed conflict are given the attention and consideration that they truly deserve.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I shall now give the floor to the other members of the Council.

Mr. Ignacio Ybáñez (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to commend you, Sir, for organizing this open debate and for the adoption of an important new resolution on children and armed conflict (resolution 2225 (2015)), of which Spain was a sponsor. The resolution is the tangible result of Malaysia's excellent work as head of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which we applaud. I would also like to express our gratitude for the briefings by the Secretary-General and by Ms. Lelia Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, and Ms. Eunice Apio, Director of the Ugandan non-governmental organization Facilitation for Peace and Development.

I am joined today by a delegation of Spanish parliamentarians led by the President of the Senate. Their presence underscores the interest and importance that Spain accords the work of the Security Council in promoting peace, security and the rights of children, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. Spain considers it a national priority to contribute to a world that will be more just, safer and more prosperous as a legacy for today's youth and future generations. In that spirit, we accept the responsibility conferred on us by the mandate of the Council and with that attitude we actively participate in negotiating texts and in debates such as the one that brings us together here today at the initiative of the Council presidency.

The issue of children and armed conflict has continued to expand since it was first placed on the Council's agenda, 10 years ago, at the initiative of France. The emergence of new conflicts and global threats made 2014 an especially tragic year — the most horrifying — for millions of girls and boys. Despite some progress, reports such as the one before us today (S/2015/409) highlight the need for the Council to continue its firm pursuit of that agenda. Along with the numerous and execrable acts of violence committed against girls and boys in armed conflict — beginning with the recruitment of child soldiers — the abduction of minors has become a routine occurrence in many conflict zones. Mass abductions are a new tactic employed in particular by non-State armed groups to terrorize civilian populations. Abduction is only the beginning of a far greater horror that generally ends in forced recruitment, sexual abuse, child trafficking, slavery, mutilation and murder. In that context, girls are especially vulnerable to being abducted for sexual purposes. Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Lord's Resistance Army in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, South Sudan and the Central African Republic, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria/Daesh embody those cruel and evil practices aimed at overwhelming all possible resistance through the use of terror.

The primary goal of the resolution just adopted is, in fact, to incorporate the abduction of children as grounds for inclusion on the Secretary-General's list of grave crimes against children in armed conflict by countries or armed groups that fail to comply with the measures of prevention and protection it provides. We welcome this substantive and far-reaching advance.

With the aim of furthering that agenda, I would like now to focus on five key areas: respect for international humanitarian law; the role of peacekeeping operations; peace agreements and the reintegration of children into civilian life; accountability; and the mobilization of public opinion.

We will not cease to insist on the absolute importance of respect for the most basic tenets of international humanitarian law. Schools and hospitals must be respected and safeguarded. On 29 May, in Oslo, Spain signed the Safe Schools Declaration along with 37 other countries, We trust that, with the support of a growing number of Member States, progress will be made in protecting schools from military use. Unfortunately, well into the twenty-first century, it

is still necessary to point out that the use of certain explosive devices, such as anti-personnnel mines or cluster bombs is utterly reprehensible, as they affect the whole civilian population, inflict inhuman damage and martyr a high number of children. In that regard, I want to speak out on behalf of Spain against the use of barrel bombs in Syria, which constitutes a flagrant war crime that must not go unpunished.

The latest report of the Secretary-General refers extensively to the shelling in densely populated areas. Those actions are difficult to justify in the light of international law and result in a number of child victims so high that they can only lead to outrage. The rocket attack in Aleppo on Monday, which resulted in dozens of deaths, including many children, is another example of indiscriminate attacks, which we strongly regret and condemn. War is an ideal breeding ground for the commission of mass crimes; hence the need to put an end to the hostilities and aggression in order to be able to work on the difficult task of building and consolidating peace.

I would also like to address the role of peacekeeping operations. They contribute significantly to international peace and security by helping countries in post-conflict situations to create the conditions that make sustainable peace possible, one in which the protection of children is a key element. Therefore, I would like to reiterate the opinion expressed by Spain in March (see S/PV.7414) on the importance of strengthening the mandates of peacekeeping missions with regard to child protection. We also believe that the countries listed by the Secretary-General that have not adopted an action plan to put an end to possible violations and abuses against children committed by members of their contingents should not contribute troops to those types of operations.

It is crucial to ensure the presence of child protection advisers in peacekeeping missions and to ensure adequate training for contingents on child-protection issues. All that is essential in order to be able to contribute to moving forward, in an increasingly decisive and effective way, on protecting children on the ground, which is a basic responsibility of States. Spain recalls the importance of continuing to fully apply the zero-tolerance policy of the Secretary-General on sexual violence and abuse and the need to ensure accountability for those involved in such acts.

I would also stress the importance of prominently incorporating the needs of children into peace agreements. Spain would like to see mechanisms that address those needs in the same way that we have encouraged the participation of women in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements.

In that respect, peace agreements cannot omit three important factors: the protection, rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims of armed conflicts. Affected States should ensure the existence of mechanisms that satisfactorily address those three issues. A good reintegration mechanism is provided by education and training programmes established to promote the interests of children and respect their status as victims. I recall, as an example of good practices, the figures provided by Colombia at the open debate of 25 March (see S/PV.7414): through the establishment of an intergovernmental commission that included 23 Government agencies, more than 4,000 minors recruited by the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional have been reintegrated in the past 10 years.

In terms of accountability, we will continue to advocate for strengthening national judicial systems, and the cooperation of the Security Council with the International Criminal Court. The fight against impunity not only restores the dignity of the victims, but acts as a deterrent. However, we must distinguish between perpetrators and victims, as it would be a paradox to put in detention children who are soldiers but who are, first and above all, victims of armed conflict. Therefore, in line with the recommendations of the Secretary-General, we are in favour of studying alternatives to criminal proceedings aimed at rehabilitation and social reintegration, always in the interest of the child. That does not mean that we cannot attribute responsibility to those responsible for their recruitment.

Finally, with regard to the mobilization of public opinion, Governments, international organizations and civil society must continue to work side by side to raise awareness among all stakeholders — from armed groups to the victims' families — of the large-scale challenge posed by all that remains to be done. The Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF have done an excellent job with the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign in collaboration with countries such as Chad and Afghanistan. Together we can help promote that agenda so that the words "child" and "soldier" are antithetical in every corner of the planet. The "No Lost Generation" campaign lead by UNICEF directed at Syrian refugees, with the support

of the European Union and Turkey, is yielding good results. On 19 May, during the holding of the second open debate of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union on children and armed conflict, there were notable examples of good practices, even in very difficult situations, such as in the Central African Republic.

I would like to conclude by thanking you, Mr. President, once again for convening this important and timely debate, which has allowed us to adopt a resolution that strengthens the fight against the cruelty that affects the youngest and most innocent members of the human race. We cannot remain indifferent to the manipulation of lives that are just starting and have the right to develop without being forever marked by violence and hatred. Debates and resolutions like today's are morally and politically imperative. When it comes to the protection of children, no effort is too great, given the size of the challenge. The international community and the Council can count on Spain to relentlessly address this challenge.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I thank the Malaysian presidency and you, Mr. Minister, for organizing this crucial debate, which comes at a particularly busy time, both politically and emotionally, in terms of the United Nations agenda. The challenges identified by the Secretary-General in terms of the protection of children in armed conflict, the abduction of children by extremist groups and the recent allegations of sexual abuse all call on us to solemnly reaffirm today our commitment to the protection of children.

I also wish to thank and commend the relentless commitment of UNICEF, represented here by Ms. Yoka Brandt, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, whose mandate is essential to improving the situation of children in armed conflict. We must all support her work and even strengthen it. Finally, I would like to convey my gratitude to Ms. Eunice Apio, from the Facilitation for Peace and Development non-governmental organization, for her enlightening and moving testimony on the abductions carried out by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda. That testimony, which is only a reflection of a tiny part of the reality endured by the nearly 24,500 children abducted since 2002, shows the added value of this debate and especially the importance of resolution 2225 (2015), which we have just adopted. It was high time to update the United Nations child-protection mechanisms so as to turn abductions into a criterion for inclusion in the Secretary-General's black list. I wish to congratulate Malaysia for its outstanding work on this issue.

The comprehensive United Nations mechanism for the protection of children deserves our attention today. Established in 2005 under the leadership of France, that mechanism now consists of the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the annual report of the Secretary-General, with its black list, the mandate of his Special Representative and, especially, a reporting and monitoring mechanism. It is essential that the mechanism, which identifies violations committed by the parties on the ground and provides information for the Secretary-General's reports and decisions, remain impartial and confidential. It is important that the United Nations continue to ensure the methodological effectiveness of the mechanism, which cannot, of course, account for all the violations committed in countries in conflict, but remains the most effective tool to date for informing us about the six grave violations of children's rights. We must therefore defend the mechanism and, if necessary, reinforce and improve it.

Indeed, the mechanism today covers violations committed by both Government forces and non-State armed groups in what are still too many situations. Most child recruitment and almost 96 per cent of abductions are committed by non-State armed groups, which are often difficult to access by the United Nations and monitoring teams. States must therefore facilitate the access of the United Nations in their territory in order to engage non-State armed groups on children's rights. That was the purpose of the open debate (see S/PV.7414) organized under the French presidency on 25 March. It was also one of the main thrusts of the non-paper that we developed on the basis of the operational proposals of Member States. It is also the thrust of the Paris Commitments and Paris Principles on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups, which we call on all States to sign.

Among the non-State armed groups, violent extremist and terrorist groups pose a special challenge for the United Nations and the international community. Unmoved by the black list and indifferent to sanctions, groups such as Daesh in Iraq and Syria and Boko Haram in West Africa continue to carry out mass crimes with complete impunity. In that context, the fight against terrorism is a necessary, albeit insufficient, response.

There is another even more powerful weapon to fight violent extremism, namely, education. It is in schools and within families that the fight against radicalization must be taught so as to prevent children from joining voluntarily, or by force, non-State armed groups. That is why France firmly condemns attacks against schools.

France was especially committed to the inclusion of such criteria as part of the path to blacklisting, back in 2011. Pursuant to resolutions 1998 (2011) and resolution 2143 (2014), France remains convinced that the military occupation of schools should be avoided. France has taken note of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, but regrets that they do not fully reflect existing international humanitarian law, which still represents the best protection for civilians and children during conflict. The scale of the violations of international humanitarian law today demonstrates that it is that body of law that must be implemented and respected by States in all circumstances.

I would like to end my statement with a case that has struck at France's very heart and affected the people of Central Africa and the United Nations as a whole, namely, the allegations of sexual violence committed against minors by foreign troops, including French soldiers. France of course takes very seriously those serious accusations. The French authorities have reacted firmly and, as soon as they were informed of the allegations, in late July 2014, immediately sought justice. A judicial inquiry is under way. The French authorities are determined to shed full light on the case, in cooperation with the United Nations and the Central African Republic. As the President of the Republic, Mr. François Hollande, most vigorously underscored, if the allegations are proved, his determination will be unforgiving, with exemplary disciplinary action imposed on those responsible, in addition to the criminal response, which is under the authority of the courts.

In that context, we hope that the Secretary-General's decision to set up an independent external review of the process by which the United Nations deals with the allegations of sexual violence by foreign troops in the Central African Republic will strengthen the early-warning and response systems of the United Nations in that regard.

Finally, in the name of truth and the fight against impunity, my country fully backs the policy of due diligence with respect to foreign troops and the zero-tolerance policy in cases of sexual abuse involving the United Nations. I reiterate that France considers the implementation of those policies a top political priority. More than ever before, we owe that not only to the victims, but to all of those that are fighting every day on behalf of the protection of children.

Mr. Barros Melet (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Malaysian presidency and Minister Dato Sri Anifah Aman for convening this open debate and commend Malaysia's excellent leadership of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We value the Secretary-General's leadership in that area and the work of his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, as well as UNICEF and other United Nations bodies, regional organizations and civil society.

We carefully followed Eunice Apio's valuable testimony, which calls upon us to act decisively to assist children who have been abducted in conflict situations from their homes, schools and refugee camps, mostly by non-State armed groups in the framework of their systematic campaigns of intimidation and reprisals against civilians.

Resolution 2225 (2015), which was adopted today, and the report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/409) are very much in accord with my country's concerns; we will therefore focus on certain aspects that, in the context of the concept note (S/2015/402, annex), deserve special attention.

Despite the progress achieved in the Secretary-General's "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which is focused on States, initiatives to achieve commitments by non-State actors and accountability must be strengthened. In that regard, the recommendations of the Secretary-General's recent report provide important guidance to States and the international community as a whole.

Furthermore, States must respond to threats to peace and security in accordance with international law, while ensuring mitigation measures to protect the children affected. Children must be treated primarily as victims, with their rehabilitation and reintegration forming the core of the efforts undertaken.

The detention of children on the grounds of their association with armed groups during conflict must be monitored through the reports of the Secretary-General. Judicial actions against demobilized children

must fall within the jurisdiction of special courts, based on international standards of juvenile justice. Detention should be a measure of last resort and should take place only in special centres for minors, and children should never be placed among adult prisoners.

We vigorously condemn the abduction of children by any and all parties to conflict, as it is not only illegal under international law but a serious violation of the Geneva Conventions and possibly a crime against humanity.

The abduction of children in conflict is a long-standing issue and one of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict established by the Council. However, since 2014 that crime's visibility has increased in the wake of recent cases requiring solutions to that scourge, which can lead to other violations such as forced labour, sexual slavery, recruitment and cross-border trafficking in children. That is why we support the listing in the annexes of the Secretary-General's reports of parties to conflict that are kidnapping children, so that they can be pressured to release their hostages and be brought to justice. Along the same lines, the Council's sanctions committees should include grave violations of the rights of children as an eligible criterion for the imposition of sanctions. Only joint, coordinated and complementary efforts will ensure the protection of fundamental rights and proper protection of the most vulnerable populations.

We also stress the importance of child protection advisers in political and peacekeeping missions with training in children's rights, and the six grave violations against children that were established by the Council, as well as prevention measures. Likewise, ceasefire agreements, peace processes and post-conflict agendas must address the issue of kidnapped children and their rehabilitation and reintegration.

The impact of armed conflict on education poses challenges in terms of major humanitarian emergencies and social and development challenges. The Council notes daily, throughout the world, bombings and burned schools, with children and their teachers as the ongoing victims of killings, mutilations, abductions and arbitrary detention. Schools are continually used by parties to armed conflict as bases, barracks or detention centres. We therefore urge parties to armed conflict to implement resolution 2143 (2014) and to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education during conflict. We encourage Member States to consider concrete steps to discourage the use of schools by armed forces and non-State armed groups, as such use violates existing international standards.

We believe that the implementation of the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, known as the Lucens Guidelines, supported by Chile through the Safe Schools Declaration of last May, will contribute to improved conduct and best practices leading to greater protection for schools and universities in times of armed conflict and reducing their use during military operations, with a view to protecting children in any and all circumstances.

Lastly, Chile would like to reiterate its firm commitment to contributing actively to the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence affecting boys and girls around the world and to continuing to work towards eradicating the six grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict.

Mrs. Ogwu (Nigeria): Mr. President, I want to welcome you to the Security Council and to thank you in particular for having convened this seminal debate.

The protection of children is undoubtedly a moral duty and a legal obligation for all States. We thank the Secretary-General for his abiding commitment to the cause of the protection of children. We wish also to thank the briefers for their insightful statements, which have not only underlined the salient dimensions of their achievements in the field but also highlighted the challenges that we all face in our collective effort to protect the world's children.

It is encouraging to note that since the adoption of resolution 1998 (2011), efforts to protect students, teachers and schools in situations of armed conflict have gained considerable momentum. The monitoring and reporting of attacks on schools and on the military use of schools have also registered some improvement, facilitating more concrete and effective responses to heinous attacks on institutions of learning.

Our abiding concern derives from our consternation at the events of the night of 14 April 2014, when 276 girls in the prime of their lives were viciously abducted from the sanctuary of their dormitories in Chibok, in the north-eastern part of Nigeria. Their dreams and aspirations were rudely interrupted by the infamous extremist group Boko Haram. It appears that we all have reached our limits of tolerance for this kind of

impunity. Today we are encouraged that the proposals designed to stem the spate of abductions of children have received due attention universally.

A fundamental and enduring step forward is to make deliberate and incremental efforts to institutionalize these policies at both the regional and national levels and, where possible, institute peer-review mechanisms for effective monitoring. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was instituted as a tool for advancing children's rights. While it builds on the same basic principles as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Union (AU) Children's Charter highlights issues of special importance in the African context.

The fact that all States members of the AU have acceded to the Children's Charter and all except seven have ratified it underscores the critical importance of the rights of children. This year, as Africa commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, represents an opportunity for States parties to make a renewed commitment to children's rights.

As a demonstration of our national commitment to the well-being of children, Nigeria was among the first group of States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration in Oslo, Norway, on 29 May. The Declaration complements and strengthens our existing national safe schools initiative, established in 2014 as part of the policy response of the federal Government to promote safe zones for learning. The guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict will serve as a compass to guide and reinforce efforts towards the achievement of this objective. We are committed to the dissemination of these guidelines and to promoting their implementation. We are indeed persuaded that this initiative will promote and protect the right to education and prevent the discontinuities in education inherent in situations of armed conflict.

We commend the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and acknowledge the importance of the monitoring and reporting mechanism for grave violations against children in armed conflict. We emphasize the critical importance of resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014), which in particular urge all parties to armed conflict to refrain from actions that impede children's access to education.

In advancing the cause of the protection of children in armed conflict, the Council today is delivering a message of hope and a signal of the strength of our collective will. The adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) today reinforces both our collective will and our shared responsibility, for it is certainly within the Council's capacity to protect the vulnerable from the ravages of conflict and other blatant breaches of peace and security.

Nigeria reiterates its commitment to working assiduously with all people of goodwill to safeguard the future of humankind: our children.

Mr. Van Bohemen (New Zealand): Foreign Minister Aman, we are honoured to have you presiding over the Council and guiding us today.

New Zealand welcomes Malaysia's initiative in bringing this item before the Council. It builds usefully on the open debate held under France's presidency in March (see S/PV.7414), when we provided an overview of our approach to this subject.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) shows that 2014 was a particularly devastating year for children in countries affected by armed conflict. Thousands of children died unnecessarily. The report highlights several trends relevant to this enormous loss. Even with the good work of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, major problems persist, especially with rehabilitation and reintegration, particularly among girls following sexual violence and among children with disabilities, thereby exacerbating the impact of conflict.

We have to face the reality that for many, including members of this Organization, targeting schools and hospitals is considered acceptable despite the fact that such action is a blatant violation of international humanitarian law. New Zealand urges all countries to put in place safeguards such as those outlined in the Safe Schools Declaration adopted in Oslo last month to protect schools and hospitals from military use in armed conflict. We owe it to our children and their futures to do all we can to protect them.

In 2014 increasing numbers of children were abducted, in particular by extremist groups, and used as tools designed to punish communities in the cruellest of ways. From the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, in Iraq and in Syria, to Boko Haram in Nigeria, children have been taken into captivity, tortured and abused, indoctrinated or sold into sexual slavery.

Resolution 2225 (2015), adopted today and which New Zealand was pleased to co-sponsor, is an

important response to this trend. Adding abductions as a trigger violation for listing in the Secretary-General's report demonstrates our commitment to calling out the perpetrators of such crimes before the international community. This can have an important deterrent effect on those who may be considering such actions and those who command them. It will also help to ensure that the right information is being documented in order to support long-term accountability. We congratulate Malaysia for its leadership in this important step forward.

New Zealand has noted with considerable concern the observations section of this year's annual report. In this, the Secretary-General deplores the fact that the way in which the case was made by some parties about the targeting of children in conflict has threatened the integrity of the Council's listing mechanism. We share the Secretary-General's concern at efforts to interfere in the independent discharge of the Secretary-General's office and the implicit presumption that some forces are exempt from criticism, whatever the objective evidence may suggest. The Secretary-General has a clear mandate to report on what he considers to be grave violations committed against children in armed conflict. When he does, he is acting at the behest of the Council — and, indeed, of the wider membership of the Organization. We all have a responsibility to protect those who cannot speak for themselves.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China appreciates Malaysia's initiative to convene this open debate of the Security Council on children and armed conflict. We welcome to New York His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs Sri Anifah Aman, who is presiding over our discussion today. I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Zerrougui, and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Brandt, for their briefings. China also listened attentively to the statement by the non-governmental organization representative.

Children are the future and the hope of the world. They are also the most vulnerable to violations and abuses. Children are bearing the brunt of armed conflict in many parts of the world. Barbaric acts against children are still occurring from time to time. In particular, the phenomenon of child abduction in armed conflicts has become increasingly acute and should command the serious attention of the international community. Parties to conflicts are responsible for the full protection of children in armed conflict. China supports the unrelenting efforts of the international community to protect children in armed conflicts. I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, we need to tackle the issue at its roots by providing a sound environment for the growth of children. The best way to protect children in conflict is to prevent, reduce and resolve conflicts at their roots. That is far more meaningful than remedial measures after the eruption of conflict. The Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It should therefore strengthen preventive diplomacy and make more use of the measures provided for in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations, such as mediation, good offices, dialogue and negotiation. It should support and encourage parties to resolve their differences peacefully and to eliminate the root causes of the problem of children caught up in armed conflicts.

Secondly, we must respect the principle of national ownership by the country concerned and create a solid foundation for the protection of children. Governments bear the primary responsibility for the protection of children in conflicts in their own countries. The key to the implementation of Council resolutions and the enforcement of various programmes and plans aimed at protecting children lies in the cooperation and efforts of the countries concerned. The international community should give full play to the leadership role of the Governments concerned and respect the sovereignty of those countries, while providing assistance and support, and should concretely strengthen their capacity-building in that field.

Thirdly, the international community should adopt a comprehensive strategy and form international synergy for the protection of children. In post-conflict rebuilding efforts, comprehensive measures must be taken to ensure that child victims of armed conflicts are smoothly reintegrated into society and to provide a favourable, secure and social environment for the health and growth of children. UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank and other relevant agencies should draw on their respective advantages, strengthen coordination and cooperation, and support the countries involved in conflicts in their efforts to eliminate poverty, provide universal education and promote sustainable development.

Fourthly, we must give priority to resolving the issue of child abductions in armed conflicts. China supports the addition of child abduction in armed conflicts as a criterion for being listed in the annex to the Secretary-General's annual report. That would help to strengthen the international community's fight against that heinous behaviour. The international community should fully utilize the resources and means available now, adopt comprehensive measures and policies and work on multiple fronts to step up the fight against the phenomenon of child abduction so as to effectively halt those acts. Measures should include, first, strengthening the sharing of information and intelligence while trying to rescue those abducted children; secondly, strengthening international cooperation to ensure that those responsible for child abduction will be brought to justice; and, thirdly, improving the rescue and resettlement of abducted children to ensure their smooth reintegration and rehabilitation.

China stands ready to work with the wider international community to fully safeguard international peace and security, to jointly improve the situation of children in armed conflict and to prevent them from suffering in wars and conflicts, as well as to foster a harmonious and secure environment for their health and growth.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open debate. I welcome the leadership that Malaysia has shown on this important issue, and I am pleased at the unanimous adoption of resolution 2225 (2015). I also thank the Secretary-General, his Special Representative Ms. Zerrougui and UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Brandt for their briefings. I welcome the powerful words of Ms. Eunice Apio. Her insights into the consequences of abduction require us all to reflect deeply. She has underscored the importance of the Security Council hearing from those working directly on these issues.

Last week, a 17-year-old British boy, a child, died in an attack by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) on an oil refinery in Iraq. His name was Talha Asmal. To those who knew him, he was an ordinary Yorkshire lad. He was friendly, kind; he worked hard at school. He should have been looking forward to university. Instead, he died a long way from home. Amid the tragedy that left 11 people dead, a sad truth emerged: Talha was not an innocent bystander caught up in the attack, he was a suicide bomber. Talha was a perpetrator, but also a victim. He was a victim of ISIL and its sickening propaganda. He was a victim of violent extremists too cowardly to act themselves. He was a victim of an increasingly violent world that does not distinguish between children and adults in conflicts. I do not seek to excuse Talha's actions. What he did was barbaric and un-Islamic. But in highlighting this example from my own country, I hope to illustrate that we all face challenges to do with children and armed conflict. It is truly a global issue, and it requires a global response.

Through today's resolution, we have taken a step forward. The expansion of the listing criteria to include abductions will enhance our ability to hold perpetrators to account. The need is great. In February, at least 89 boys were kidnapped in the Upper Nile state in South Sudan. These are in addition to the hundreds of children abducted by ISIL — and by Boko Haram, as our Nigerian colleague so eloquently described in 2014 (see S/PV.7259), making that arguably the worst year for children in recent memory. Those sick groups abduct children to use them forcibly as child soldiers. They bind them into sexual slavery and turn them into weapons of war to terrorize families and communities. The trigger in a new resolution is a clear declaration from the Security Council that we will not tolerate the abduction of children in any form or for any purpose.

But listing is just the first step towards ending impunity. We want to see more progress on ensuring accountability. States must exercise their national jurisdiction to bring those listed to account, and if they fail to do so, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has an important role to play. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) notes, the transfer to the ICC of Dominic Ongwen, who himself was abducted as a child in 1989, shows that we must take a long-term approach. We have seen some progress this year, including the conviction and sentencing of Thomas Lubanga, and we welcome the fact that Bosco Ntaganda's trial will commence shortly.

More needs to be done. In the case of Syria we cannot afford to become numb to the recruitment, detention, torture, killing and maiming in that children in that country — whether by the regime, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant or others. There is a clear call for action by the international community. The Secretary-General's report sets out the case: 889 schools attacked, 413 medical facilities damaged, 368 children killed and 771 injured. All of these events took place in 2014. The Secretary-General's report shows

that the vast majority of those acts were committed by Syrian Government forces. Thus such, the United Kingdom believes adamantly that situation in Syria must be referred to the ICC.

There are ways out. In Syria we maintain that this must be through a political solution; there can be no military solution. We support the efforts of Special Envoy de Mistura to take forward the implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and ultimately enable the Syrian people to decide their own future.

Across the world, there is a way out. The roles that they play are listed in the Secretary-General's report. Whether Government or non-State armed groups, they can adopt concrete, time-bound action plans to halt violations and abuses. Eventually, that can lead to delisting. Action plans work. We congratulate Chad for the successful delisting of the Chadian national army last year, following the full implementation of their action plan. I call on all listed parties — Governments and non-State armed groups — to follow their example.

I would like to conclude with this final point. How a society treats its most vulnerable — be they children, the infirm or elderly — is always a measure of its humanity, and even more so during instability and conflict. When a society begins to disregard the vulnerable and their rights, instability and conflict will only grow. The litany of violations and abuses against children in the Secretary-General's report is evidence of that spread. It has spread so far that children across the world, whether from Syria or Yorkshire, are now caught up as both victims and tools of conflict. Through today's resolution we have taken one step forward to ending that, but many more steps will be needed if we are to eradicate this problem. We cannot waver in our resolve.

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are pleased to welcome you, Mr. Minister, as President of the Security Council and would like to thank you for having organized today's meeting. We are also grateful to the invited briefers for their comprehensive statements. We would like to single out the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Zerrougui, to protect children affected by armed conflict in various parts of the world.

We have very carefully reviewed the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) prepared for today's meeting. We share its concerns regarding the dire situation of millions of children affected by armed conflict throughout the world. Of particular concern is the new trend of violence against children carried out by terrorist organizations and other groups that espouse ideologies of extremist violence. The cynicism of Boko Haram is horrendous, characterized by its abduction of a large group of girls, an event that shocked the entire world.

The weakening of State institutions in countries in the Middle East and North Africa has created a breeding ground for the growth of violent extremism and terrorist activity. Before the eyes of the world, the so-called Islamic State has seized large swathes of territory, declaring them a caliphate and establishing its order there. Children are among the first victims of such groups. Terrorist groups use the Internet and various social media not only to recruit children and young adults as fighters, but also as suicide bombers. The number of instances of killing children and of sexual violence and mass abduction of children continues to grow. Increasingly, these crimes have become hallmarks of today's armed conflicts.

We decisively condemn violations of the norms of international law, international humanitarian law and international law relating to human rights and the rights of refugees with regard to children, regardless of who commits them. Both premeditated attacks and the indiscriminate or excessive use of force are unacceptable. Justifying civilian deaths — including those of children — by the unavoidability of so-called collateral damage is equally unacceptable. In this vein, and of particular concern, the deteriorating situation in Yemen and the tragic situation of children in Syria present yet another argument for the rapid resolution of these conflicts. Concerns for the safety of children should be a constant priority in any peacekeeping operation or counter-terrorism activity.

Unfortunately, children continue to die because of armed conflicts throughout the world. We continue to be concerned by the plight of children in south-eastern Ukraine. As a result of an armed conflict that, as defined by the International Committee of the Red Cross, is not international in character, that country has seen mass violations of children's rights to life, security, safety, health, education and medical treatment. Since May of this year, in the conflict zone, over 68 children were killed and 176 wounded. Artillery and mortar attacks from Ukrainian forces destroyed kindergartens,

schools, clinics, hospitals, maternal wards and orphanages. As a result of Kyiv's de facto economic blockade of territories not under its control, children in the conflict zone are deprived of food, drinking water, drugs and medical assistance. Large-scale humanitarian assistance provided by Russia to residents of the Donbas region is meant to help children as well. Since the beginning of the conflict, over 100 children have received expert medical treatment in Russia. Only a few days ago, group of sick children and their parents from Donbas reached Moscow by plane. There were 14 children in that group. They all suffer from various problems. Some have been injured by shelling and others are extremely ill.

Clearly, large-scale violations against children, in various armed conflicts require that special attention be given to their rehabilitation — providing them with psychological, medical and legal assistance. The protection of children is the responsibility of Governments, and most States affected by armed conflicts are striving to improve the situation of children in their countries. They have a right to expect help in their efforts from the United Nations system as well as civil society organizations. We are encouraged that in today's resolution 2225 (2015) significant attention is given to issues of national responsibility for the protection of children, their rehabilitation and their reintegration. Furthermore, we welcome the decision to consider the abduction of children as another criterion for inclusion of parties to an armed conflict in the annex to the annual report of the Secretary-General on this topic.

We hope that the new Security Council resolution will reinforce the reporting and monitoring mechanism and the activities led by Malaysia's thematic Working Group. Since its inception pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), the Working Group has achieved a great deal in improving the situation of children in a number of countries affected by armed conflict. To ensure maximum efficiency in this work, it is important — and in this regard we fully support our Malaysian colleagues — to expand constructive cooperation with the Governments concerned.

Mr. Mangaral (Chad) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to welcome you, Mr. President, and congratulate you on organizing this open debate under the Malaysian presidency of the Security Council, as well as on the initiative of moving forward resolution 2225 (2015), which incorporates the issue of the abduction of children in armed conflicts. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, his Special Representative Leila Zerrougui, Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, and Ms. Eunice Apio, from the non-governmental organization Facilitation for Peace and Development.

As we adopt this resolution in the month of June, hundreds if not thousands of children are being abducted to be used for various purposes in armed conflicts, in particular to fight against their will in the forces of parties to conflict or to be used as bargaining chips, in flagrant violation of international law. The vast majority of such acts are committed by such armed or terrorist groups as Boko Haram and Daesh. The members of the Security Council deplore and condemn such abductions and the extreme barbarity with which the perpetrators treat the children concerned. Unfortunately, the Secretary-General's annual report for 2014 (S/2015/409) states that there has been an unprecedented rise in violence against children and that their abduction has become the defining characteristic of conflicts all over the world. That constitutes a significant challenge to their protection, bearing in mind that 230 million of them are currently in the affected areas.

Resolution 2225 (2015), which we have just adopted, is crucial because it establishes the abduction of children as one of the trigger violations for the listing of parties to conflicts in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report. Such listing reflects the will of the entire international community and will undoubtedly encourage international, regional and subregional cooperation and effectively contribute to achieving the objectives of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. In that connection, we support the recommendation in the Secretary-General's report that grave violations against children be included as a criterion for sanctions in Security Council committees so that child abduction can be more effectively combated.

We think that States can also use such measures to improve their national legislation on eliminating violations against children, including abduction. To mitigate and prevent such abduction, however, States must also facilitate contact between United Nations bodies and non-State armed groups. It was in fact because of dialogue with such armed groups that questions of child protection were incorporated into the peace agreements in the Central African Republic, making it possible to free several hundred children from the clutches of armed groups at the end of the Bangui

Forum in May. The same goes for South Sudan, where 1,757 children have already been freed from the grasp of the Cobra Faction, although that figure remains lower than the 33,000 expected.

Impunity in relation to violence against children, however, remains a major concern in most cases. In that connection, we would emphasize the importance of the recommendations in the Secretary-General's report and call upon the Member States to hold the perpetrators of such violence accountable.

Schools, universities and hospitals continue to be subject to violent attacks and occupation for military purposes. We reiterate our call to the parties to armed conflicts to respect the vital, civilian character of such institutions. We also believe that the measures set out in the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, endorsed through the Safe Schools Declaration, adopted in Oslo on 29 May, will effectively ensure the protection of such institutions.

We must also not overlook illegal transfers of small arms and light weapons, the stockpiling of which undermines the efforts of the United Nations and adversely affects children in areas affected by armed conflict.

We believe that the withdrawal of children from the forces of parties to conflict is essential to their reintegration, but given their lack of financial resources and future prospects, they are often vulnerable to being recruited again. We encourage States and financial partners to further intensify their efforts so as to consolidate the reintegration measures already taken and to prevent further recruitment. An overarching strategy for the protection of children and school facilities needs to be defined more urgently now than ever before, but that cannot be done without tackling the causes of violence and eradicating terrorism.

We welcome the progress made in the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign in 2014 and the efforts of the international community, particularly the United Nations, through the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui. We encourage them to continue their work to achieve the campaign's objectives by 2016. We reiterate our support for regional and subregional organizations' leadership in and contribution to efforts to protect children, and we urge such organizations to intensify their efforts in that area.

Chad has maintained its partnership with the United Nations and is developing sustained cooperation at the regional and subregional levels, in particular with neighbouring States. In 2015, we have demobilized and reintegrated children who had been forced to join ex-Séléka fighters in the Central African Republic and had crossed the border into Chad. In April we also returned to their countries approximately 30 children snatched by the Chadian National Army from the clutches of Boko Haram. Chadian children in the same situation have been entrusted to the Ministry of Social Action for reintegration, with the help of UNICEF, for whose valuable support we would like to reiterate our appreciation.

Lastly, the inclusion of parties to conflict in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict is an important tool for combating violations of children's rights and could dissuade many parties tempted to commit such violations. If that measure is to have the desired effects, however, it must apply indiscriminately to all those who are committing such violations today. We dare to hope that the Secretary-General's next report on children and armed conflict will reflect that concern.

Mr. Hmoud (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*):I would like first of all to welcome you, Mr. President, to the Security Council, and to thank you for giving us this opportunity to discuss the important issue of the protection of children in armed conflict. We also thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon; his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui; the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Yoka Brandt; and the representative of Facilitation for Peace and Development, Ms. Eunice Apio, for their very informative briefings.

There has been an unprecedented increase in the number of crimes and violations committed against children in armed conflicts, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. Among those inhuman violations we would highlight the crime of child abduction. The number of children abducted in armed conflicts since 2002 has exceeded 25,000, and 95 per cent of them were abducted by non-State armed groups in an organized, structured manner so that they could be recruited or terrorized, or for the purposes of extortion.

The deficiencies in the protection of civilians at all levels, particularly children in armed conflicts, result from a failure to address the threat posed by armed

groups and the early-warning signs of armed conflicts as soon as they appear, or to impose the necessary legal limits. Those are the most important reasons for the increase in the number of attacks on children in armed conflicts, their abduction by armed groups and their forced participation in criminal and terrorist acts.

We must make every effort to work together to end the abduction of children and prevent it from spreading or being used in a systematic way in many armed conflicts. That will require efforts, first, at the national level, because the protection of civilians, and particularly children, is above all the responsibility of the State; secondly, at the regional level, through cooperation among States and common strategies to combat cross-border armed groups with a view to weakening them, containing them and limiting their spread; and, thirdly, at the international level, through the Security Council and the international legal bodies that address the abduction of children in armed conflicts in a broader context. In that regard, I would like to highlight the steps it is essential to take if the problem is to be solved or limited, and which should continue to be improved in both the medium and long term.

At the national level, we should raise awareness about the protection of children in armed conflict through education and social networks, which can play an important role in educating people from different social groups in countering the media publicity exploited by terrorist groups such as Daesh and Boko Haram in order to attract young people and children through their mistaken beliefs. The media constitute a weapon every bit as dangerous as the arms that such groups use, whether for terrorizing or killing civilians. States should also institute the necessary judicial and legislative reforms, including by enacting and strengthening laws aimed at criminalizing any kind of attack on children. We should strengthen policies designed to deal with violations against children, ensure access to the medical and psychiatric services they will need and provide programmes for victims' rehabilitation and social reintegration.

Mrs. Adnin took the Chair.

At the regional level, we emphasize the importance of States exchanging security and military intelligence, as well as the necessity for inter-State coordination. We are currently witnessing an increase in the flow of foreign fighters across national borders, as if the world had become an open space for them to carry out their terrorist acts in. Reconciliation accords and instruments agreed on regionally or among regional or national parties can sometimes work to the detriment of other essential components, particularly those relating to accountability and criminal prosecution. In that regard, we would like to underscore the importance of a comprehensive political process that addresses all types of threats and security situations. It is crucial that the United Nations and the Security Council follow up such agreements to ensure that they do not fail to punish those responsible for crimes against civilians, particularly children, and that such criminals are not permitted impunity.

The international community must take measures aimed at working, with States' cooperation, to halt this phenomenon and at providing technical, logistical and material assistance, particularly for fragile States that do not have the capacity for protection and deterrence. Measures for deterring the perpetrators of these crimes include ensuring accountability and combating impunity, especially for crimes against children, whether through sexual violence or abduction, that are prohibited and punishable as war crimes and crimes against humanity under international law. Crimes and abuses of children, including abduction, should be included in the mandates of sanctions committees, with the criminals' names added to the sanctions list and included in the annex to the Secretary-General's reports on children in armed conflict and those published by the relevant international organizations. Along with that, work must be done to document such crimes and violations in cooperation with national Governments and through the creation of investigative and fact-finding commissions on crimes committed against children from the beginning of each and every armed conflict.

In order to ensure that these measures are implemented as well as possible, it is vital that we promote cooperation between the Security Council and the Secretariat. We can ensure the protection of children, the most fragile members of society, by establishing links between the tasks involved in peacekeeping, increasing the numbers of specialized experts and making sure that they have the resources they need to ensure the best possible deployment of their capacities and skills in that field.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/409) paints a very grim picture of the violations committed against children in armed conflict at the international level. In our view, there is a great deal of work to be done

if we are to ensure that those children have protection and support. While the report mentionw the violations committed by Israel against Palestinian children during the most recent aggression against Gaza, we were shocked to see that Israel's violations are not included in the list contained in the annex to the report, despite the fact that the report cites many other situations, entities and countries. That runs contrary to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Legal protection should be guaranteed at the same level to all, regardless of what side they are on. It is essential to be seen to be objective and transparent when it comes to including States and entities that commit crimes against children, and to have a clear mechanism, based on criteria that guarantee the protection of children in every region of the world and ensure legal accountability for all those who commit such crimes, without exception.

Jordan is working to offer Syrian refugee children a second chance at a better future and to ensure that they are protected and served as well as possible in the wake of all that they have endured in Syria and after the violations of their rights that they have suffered at the hands of the regime and the terrorist armed groups. In coordination with the specialized agencies of the United Nations and non-government organizations, Jordan has established a reception centre for the children of refugees and a centre designed to promote an educational and preventive environment for children, along with the provision, with the help of UNICEF, of psychological and social assistance. We have opened the doors of our schools, public and private, to the children of Syrian refugees, because education is the best possible thing we can offer them so that they can build a better future.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that Jordan supports the protection of children in armed conflict, the item on today's agenda. We also support the efforts of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougi, and we encourage all the parties to conflicts whose names are mentioned in the Secretary-General's report to sign and implement action plans designed to deal with the issue of flagrant violations against children and to promote international peace and security.

Ms. Murmokaité (Lithuania): I would like to thank Malaysia for holding this open debate. I also thank the briefers for their presentations.

Lithuania aligns itself with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Armed conflicts continue to have a horrific impact on children and, as we heard today from both the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, last year was one of the worst in recent memory. Recruited as child soldiers, stunted by malnourishment and starvation, forced to witness the death of their parents and siblings, abducted and turned into suicide bombers, sold in slave markets like cattle, children in conflict zones are denied the most basic of human rights.

Granted, in recent years there have been some positive steps in the protection of children in armed conflicts, and we would like to express our appreciation for the dedicated and passionate work of Special Representative Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui to that effect. The incorporation of child protection provisions into peacekeeping mandates, the inclusion of crimes against children among sanctions designation criteria, the campaign "Children Not Soldiers", child protection advisers, national action plans — these have all been important developments. And yet countless children across the Middle East, in Africa and even in the middle of Europe continue to suffer from conflict-related violence.

In eastern Ukraine foreign aggression and the reign of lawlessness imposed by illegal militants have caused massive displacement, primarily impacting the elderly and children. The latter account for more than 161,000, or some 18 per cent, among registered internally displaced persons, while the total number of children affected by this conflict amounts to 1.7 million. The restricted access to medical services and education, life in temporary shelters and basements of damaged buildings and continued psychological trauma are the daily reality for those children in eastern Ukraine. Child soldiers have been recently spotted by the monitors of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe among the ranks of the illegal militants.

In Syria, the worst humanitarian crisis of our time, 7.5 million children are in need of humanitarian aid, 2.6 million are deprived of education opportunities and close to 2 million are living as refugees in neighbouring countries. Across Yemen, 9.5 million children require humanitarian assistance, 3,600 schools, or 76 per cent of the country's total, have closed due to insecurity and 1.83 million children lost over two months of school. More and more young boys are seen manning checkpoints and involved in armed groups.

Those are but a few cases where conflicts are taking a heavy toll of children's lives. The list of

such cases, however, is devastatingly long. If we remember yesterday's statement by the Executive Director of UNICEF on atrocities in Unity state, South Sudan — boys castrated and left to bleed, girls as young as eight gang-raped and murdered, some 13,000 children forced to participate in a conflict not of their own making — it reminds us once again of the darkest depths of inhumanity that we humans can reach.

Abductions of children are being increasingly used by armed groups and terrorists as a tactic of war, to impose their murderous rule and to target particular ethnic or religious groups. The Chibok girls abducted by Boko Haram in Nigeria and the abduction of Kurdish boys and Yezidi children by Daesh are among the best known recent atrocities and crimes against humanity. The Lord's Resistance Group (LRA), which the Council discussed only last week, is known to have abducted some 30,000 children, boys and girls, some as young as six, over two decades. Abducted children are forced to commit rape and torture and a re forced into regular combat to kill, often blurring the lines between the victim and the perpetrator. Daesh, known for its exceptional wanton brutality, has been widely reported to turn abducted girls, some as young as 10, into sex slaves, sold and resold on slave markets, some as many as 20 times.

It is hard to find the right words to describe the psychological trauma and the impact on children's minds in such situations. Over time, some of those children turn from victims into victimizers themselves, as was the case of Dominic Ongwen, who was abducted at the age of 14 on his way to school and later became a notorious LRA commander. Former abductees face tremendous challenges of reintegrating into normal life. They are often shunned and rejected by their own families and communities, especially former girl soldiers and repeated rape victims.

A recent article by photojournalist Marc Ellison provides a telling story of several former LRA girl child soldiers, including one called Mary, who was abducted before she was 10 and forced to become a rebel "wife" at the age of 12. No longer a child soldier, she is rejected by her own community. "If she comes back to live, people have said they will burn her alive in our own hut", says that girl's mother.

No doubt it is a story common to many former abductees and child soldiers, who suffer ostracism and exclusion because of their past. Some of them even wish for the time they were wielding the gun as child soldiers, missing the false sense of empowerment it provided over the lives of others. Today such worrying signals are beginning to emerge from the Central African Republic where the lack of options and opportunities to reintegrate into civilian life may be pushing some of the released former child soldiers back into the hands of armed groups.

While the release of children is of the utmost importance, it is no less important to acknowledge that release must be accompanied by comprehensive, creative programmes aimed at addressing the profound damage inflicted upon the children, combining measures of reintegration, training, livelihood opportunities, psycho-social assistance and community education. The role of civil society, non-governmental organizations and community leaders, including on tackling the stigma carried by such children, is extremely important.

We must remember to treat children as victims first, not as perpetrators. In that regard, we welcome the steps taken by the Government of Chad in signing the protocol agreement with the United Nations regarding the handover of children associated with armed forces or groups to child protection actors. Such protocols could be a valuable tool for child rehabilitation.

As mentioned in the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/409), accountability for violence against children remains far too rare, even in countries that have criminalized the recruitment of children. Protecting children from serious crimes and preventing such crimes from being committed go hand in hand with tackling impunity and ensuring that the perpetrators are held to account.We welcome the transfer of Dominic Ongwen to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity and war crimes. Yet, as some colleagues said earlier today, more needs to be done to combat impunity. While the perpetrators are many, the cases and judgments against them remain few and far between. The preventive, deterrent effects of such judgments on would-be perpetrators has yet to be felt. As some cases remain pending, we look forward to the continued work of the ICC to this effect, but also to greater national efforts to pursue accountability.

Child recruitment, killings, maimings and attacks against schools are listed as sanctions triggers. In that context, we welcome the adoption of today's resolution 2225 (2015), which draws attention to abductions as a

disturbingly prevalent feature of modern armed conflict and includes abductions as an additional listing trigger.

In conclusion, we have a wide range of instruments to tackle impunity for conflict-related crimes against children. We must close the gap between the existing legislation and their application, in order to put an end to violence against children and restore them the biggest gift they can have: a safe and secure childhood and the right to be who they are — children.

Mr. Ramírez Carreño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, we would like to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, Mr. Anifah Aman, for his presence here and for convening this open debate on children in armed conflict, a topic to which my country attaches great importance due to its impact on the weakest and most vulnerable part of the population. We would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Yoka Brandt, for their briefings. We would also like to thank Ms. Eunice Apio for her testimony and participation today.

Venezuela reiterates its firm rejection of the abuses and violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law against boys and girls in armed conflict, and urges all parties to comply with their obligations under applicable international law. The report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409) that we are discussing today points out that in 2014 we saw unprecedented difficulties in protecting tens of millions of children who live in conflict situations. That is discouraging because it undermines the future of children who today are experiencing the atrocities of war and who are condemned to grow up with a culture of hate and violence. That must draw the attention of the international community to make children a priority and to decisively tackle grave violations of children's rights.

In many cases, socioeconomic vulnerability, abuses, ethnic and religious intolerance, discrimination, exclusion and violence, which these children face as a consequence of war, facilitate their participation in the hostilities and worsens the harmful repercussions that armed conflict can have on them. The report of the Secretary-General and the deplorable and tragic situation of children in armed conflict should serve to mobilize all of the moral forces of the international community to stop the military escalation of conflict and to protect girls and boys with all available resources, children who on a daily basis are traumatized daily, kidnapped, abused and killed.

The Secretary-General's report stresses that the majority of violations of the rights of children are committed by non-State actors and that extremist violence has intensified to unprecedented levels. We reiterate that the Council should take the necessary measures to guarantee a genuine commitment to stop encouraging armed groups and other non-State actors with financial or military capabilities, whose goal is to destabilize Governments and perpetuate the spiral of violence.

With regard to the references to Syria, Iraq and Yemen contained in the report, we are deeply concerned about the situation of children in those conflicts. We wonder how many more children will have to lose their lives and become martyrs to terrorism and violent extremism before the actors with influence on the parties to the conflict understand the urgency of working decisively to find a political solution to that tragedy — a solution that should include all parties.

The Secretary-General's report states that 557 Palestinian children were killed in 2014, the third highest figure in the world for that year, and that at least 4,249 boys and girls were wounded. At least 543 schools were damaged or destroyed in the State of Palestine in 2014, which is the highest number recorded in all situations of armed conflict during that calendar year. We can therefore see that the occupying Power in Palestine repeatedly violated at least three of the six criteria used to designate grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. However, we note with concern that the military forces responsible for those acts were not included on the annexes in the Secretary-General's report this year. We ask what scale the grave violations committed by the occupying Power in Palestine against civilians, especially children, would need to reach in order to consider including the perpetrators of those violations in the annexes to the report.

We emphasize that failure to act in accordance with the Council's resolutions on this issue — making selective use of the criteria for listing the parties in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report — saps the

spirit and intent of those resolutions. That weakens and calls into question the transparency and objectivity of the mechanism that the United Nations and its Member States should employ in that respect. We support accountability for violations committed against children in armed conflicts, as the report recommends. No one should be exempt. States have the primary responsibilty to put an end to impunity and to try and punish the perpetrators of heinous crimes against children.

We congratulate Malaysia for taking the initiative to bring to the floor resolution 2225 (2015), which was unanimously adopted today and which our country resolutey sponsored. The inclusion of kidnapping among the criteria for inclusion in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports had been a pending issue. We welcome the consensus achieved today among the members of the Security Council and hope that the resolution will be effectively implemented.

Venezuela condemns the abduction of boys and girls in armed conflict such as those currently taking place in Africa and the Middle East. We believe such abductions should be included in the category of crimes considered by the International Criminal Court. At the same time, we repudiate and condemn the indiscriminate bombing in densely populated areas and the use of weapons prohibited under international law.

We urge all parties to conflict to refrain from using schools for military purposes and goals. The use of such facilities for military purposes undermines the human rights of children in terms of their right to education and constitutes an act of intolerance and barbarism.

Finally, in our own region, we would like to highlight the consolidation of the progress being made by Colombia, within the framework of the ongoing peace process, with respect to the protection and reintegration of children affected by the long conflict in that brotherly country.

To conclude, we would like to state that Venezuela will continue to offer its firm support to the efforts of the international community, including the Security Council, to protect and assist the most vulnerable groups in areas of conflict, especially girls, boys and women, in order to ensure their rehabilitation, including their physical and psychological recovery and their reintegration into society.

Mr. Pressman (United States of America): I would like to begin by thanking Foreign Minister Aman for presiding over this meeting and for Malaysia's leadership of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Brandt for their briefings and their important work on this issue, as well as, in particular, our guest briefer, Eunice Apio, for her powerful words today and for the tremendous work that she and Facilitation for Peace and Development are doing to help women and children recover from armed conflict.

Let me say first that we share the outrage of Special Representative Zerrougui at recent reports of children being unlawfully targeted and killed and sexually assaulted in Unity state, South Sudan, apparently by Government forces or Government-backed militias. According to UNICEF, as many as 129 children from Unity state were killed during only three weeks last month. Survivors reported that boys were castrated and left to bleed to death, girls raped and children tied together, their throats slit. Those heinous crimes must not go unanswered, and it is for each of us to make clear to the perpetrators that their actions against their fellows citizens will have a cost. The United States will work with other Member States in the Council and through other forums to respond to the call to action that those barbaric crimes demand to protect the children of South Sudan and to ensure that the perpetrators of those acts are held accountable.

The Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict should be a valuable and trusted resource for advancing accountability against the world's most serious abusers of children. This year alone we have seen the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) publicly execute and stone children. We have seen kids manipulated to literally explode themselves in the service of Boko Haram terrorists, and the continued unlawful recruitment and use of children in South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan.

The Secretary-General's annual report should contribute to our common cause to protect children by using standards that are applied uniformly when documenting the actions of all parties in conflict, so that it is perceived as credible, objective and non-political. But if that report is politicized, if it becomes more of a political tool to advance political agendas rather than a clear application of facts to objective standards, it will be seriously compromised.

Let us be clear. The idea that the Government of Israel would be listed on the same page as ISIL, Boko Haram or Syria, as some have suggested in this debate, is factually and fundamentally wrong. The comparisons of casualty numbers that we have heard from some today are totally misleading. Multiple United Nations agencies and this year's report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409) have explicitly stated that the casualty numbers in Syria cannot be verified and are almost certainly underreported. Comparing those underreported numbers to documented deaths meets no standard of credibility and seems like a blatant attempt to vilify rather than illuminate.

We welcome the adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) and the addition of abductions as a trigger for being listed in the Secretary-General's annex. Mass abductions, especially of young women and children, are becoming part of the extremists' playbook for terrorizing communities, and the United States supports fully the attention that this violation will now receive. Today I want to highlight what we can do better to help children victimized by armed conflict.

First and foremost, it is obviously the responsibility of States and armed groups to stop taking children from their homes to engage in hostilities. We have made some progress in places such as the Central African Republic, where armed groups recently agreed to stop recruiting child soldiers and committed to releasing the 6,000 to 10,000 child soldiers currently in their ranks. But promising to release children is just the beginning — in fact, releasing those children from armed forces and armed groups is itself also just the beginning. The work of reintegrating them — meaningfully, compassionately, respectfully — is critical and all too often overlooked. It is a long path to recovery, and our collective attention span to the challenge needs to be expanded.

After Boko Haram militants attacked and burned down the village of a 16-year-old girl in Nigeria last year, they made her watch as her captors brutally killed her neighbours. Her captors beat her when she tried to escape. When she finally managed to escape in June, she was met with rejection and suspicion by her neighbours who had survived the massacre. They stigmatized her and other girls escaping from Boko Haram, taunting them and calling them "Boko Haram wives", leaving the escaped girls isolated and alone. And that young girl, pregnant with the child of her captor, continues to struggle — like so many liberated children — through psychological and physical trauma.

On top of all of that, for those who have escaped or have been released or rescued, many have missed whatever educational and other opportunities that may have existed. Suffering physically and psychologically and lacking opportunity, these children are not only in pain, they are caught in a terrible bind. That is why initiatives like the one launched by the United States last March, a public-private partnership that has created spaces to provide support, has deployed mobile clinics and outreach workers in Iraq and has supported Yezidi women and girls who escaped captivity, are so important.

Of course, the best way to give children the bright future that we want them to have is to protect them from harm in the first place. That is why tools like the Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2008 in the United States are critical. We urge other Governments to adopt similar legislation to help end the practice of the unlawful recruitment and use of child soldiers by holding accountable Governments that violate those basic principles. Under that United States law, foreign Governments that unlawfully recruit or use child soldiers, or that support armed groups that do so, are subject to restrictions on certain United States security assistance and the commercial licensing of military equipment, as they should be.

We also lead by example when engaged in military operations. United States forces receive training in civilian protection throughout their careers; it is woven throughout military doctrine. The imperative to avoid harming civilians, including children, has become even more explicit in recent tactical directives from our commanders to their forces, directives that go beyond what is required under international law and often result in forces having to assume additional operational and other risks in order to minimize the possibility of harming children. It is the right thing to do, and other militaries should follow that example.

When those engaged in or supporting peacekeeping efforts are accused of abusing the very children whom they are sent to protect, there must be zero tolerance. There is no room in United Nations peacekeeping or in any regional or national missions for those who prey on the vulnerable.

As the Secretary-General's report shows, too many States and armed groups are not living up to their minimum obligations under international law. That is why we have convened here today, and that is why we call on all of our colleagues to commit ourselves once again

to documenting violations and abuses against children, to take seriously the need for rigorous standards and methodology in monitoring and reporting across all trigger events — now including abductions — and to do all we can to help children who have been through such horrendous experiences in armed conflict to recover.

Children who have been touched by armed conflict deserve to live meaningful lives that are free from violence and the painful effects of their experiences. They deserve to experience life beyond war, and it is our responsibility to ensure that they will.

Mr. Lucas (Angola): Angola thanks the Malaysian presidency of the Security Council for convening this open debate on an issue of critical importance, namely, the fate of children caught in the middle of armed conflicts and the suffering that they endure. The international community pledged to find solutions to this problem of extreme gravity. The adoption today of resolution 2225 (2015) is a further step in that direction. Children are supposed to lead their lives as children, surrounded by love and care, and not have their childhood stolen by war, abduction and abuse. We welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia in presiding over this debate. We also welcome the remarks by the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui. We also thank the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Yoka Brandt, and the Director of the Facilitation for Peace and Development, Ms. Eunice Apio. We were deeply touched by Ms. Apio's testimony on the despicable actions of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and its consequences.

We face daunting challenges in protecting millions of children in countries affected by armed conflict, including, just to mention the most notorious cases, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Syria, South Sudan, Yemen, Libya, Myanmar, Nigeria, Palestine, Gaza, Afghanistan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Children are exposed to the most egregious violations of their fundamental rights, among which is the denial of the most basic one — the right to life. Extreme violence has risen to unprecedented levels. Too often it targets children, prompting worldwide outrage. The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/409) gives a tragic account of that reality worldwide.

Preventing the outbreak of conflicts is still the best way to protect children, but unfortunately the international community still lacks the appropriate tools for effective preventive action. Meanwhile, the protection of children in armed conflict is best achieved through a comprehensive strategy of protection and humanitarian response.

The increasing trend in the mass abductions of children is a matter of the utmost concern. Abduction is a precursor to other forms of violations of children's rights. Abducted children are used as messengers and porters, as spies, as human shields and suicide bombers. They are held as sexual slaves for ransom, retaliation and indoctrination by extremist groups for the commission of horrendous crimes.

Developing ways to prevent the abduction of children by armed groups would be the most effective strategy for reducing the number of child combatants under the yoke of terrorists. However, success in preventing such trends has been disappointing. In Iraq and Syria, over 1,000 girls and boys were abducted by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. In Nigeria, Boko Haram abducted hundreds of women and girls in major attacks in Chibok and across the country's north-east. The case of the LRA is the most notorious and abhorrent. Violence and hatred against children seems to be the only motivation of LRA actions. We condemn in the strongest terms the mass abduction of children by armed terrorist groups and call on affected Member States and the entire international community to do everything in their power to pursue the perpetrators and hold them accountable for such horrific crimes. We urge the immediate release of all abducted children and the provision of adequate support to permit them to rebuild their shattered lives and fulfil their potential. Appropriate measures to rehabilitate and reintegrate those children should be put in place by concerned States and by international community actors as a matter of priority. Angola is particularly committed to this issue. We have been affected by the phenomenon in the past but have been able to find acceptable solutions for the reintegration of former child soldiers.

We welcome the expansion of the listing criteria in resolution 1612 (2005) to include abduction as an additional reason for listing in the annexes of the reports of the Secretary-General and for the United Nations monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. That will ensure that those responsible for abductions are identified and held accountable, without using double standards, as the President rightly pointed out in his statement.

In that regard, resolution 2225 (2015), which was adopted today and which my delegation was honoured to sponsor, expanded the listing criteria, thereby strengthening the Council's response to grave violations of the rights of children, taking note of the fact that abduction is a serious violation of international humanitarian law and may amount to a war crime or a crime against humanity.

The report of the Secretary-General highlights the problem caused by the deprivation of liberty imposed on children as a result of their alleged association with extremist groups without due review to the legality of such detention. The situation of the children should be carefully considered, since many of them are in fact victims and should be treated as such. Additionally, Member States must ensure that trial procedures are consistent with international juvenile-justice standards and the principle of preserving the best interest of the child and their specific needs and vulnerabilities.

Currently we are witnessing an increasing trend of attacks against schools and hospitals. Military forces and non-State armed groups have turned schools into shelters, detention facilities, barracks and military bases. As a tactic of war and given their basic obscurantism and fundamentalist hostility to the idea of granting universal education to children, extremist groups target schools. That constitutes an egregious social abuse, as it deprives children of their basic right to education and endangers the safety and lives of students and teachers. Member States and the international community must do more to protect or help protect schools, students and teachers in situations of armed conflict and ensure that schools remain a safe place, while also respecting their civil-society character.

We recognize that United Nations peace operations play a vital role in the protection of children, the fulfilment of which requires adequate training, and we welcome the engagement and progress made by the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign in its first year of existence.

We further encourage the Member States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to adopt and implement legal measures to prohibit and criminalize the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

We conclude by praising the Malaysian delegation for its commitment as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and its efforts to advance the protection of children caught up in the midst of war. We furthermore commend Malaysia for its efforts to advance the fight against the criminal scourge groups that abduct children and abuse and use them in committing the most abominable of crimes.

Once again, we thank the Malaysian presidency for providing this opportunity to discuss these very important and critical issues.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I would also like to appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a normal speed so that interpretation may be provided properly. I also wish to inform all concerned that we will be carrying on this open debate right through the lunch hour, as we have a very large number of speakers.

I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy.

Mr. Gentiloni (Italy): I wish to thank the Malaysian presidency for convening today's open debate and for introducing resolution 2225 (2015), which recognizes abductions in armed conflict as a listing criterion in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409).

I also thank the Secretary-General, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF for their work in identifying ways that will help us better prevent and respond to the scourges that continue to afflict children in armed conflict. I am here to reaffirm Italy's strong support for the Council's endeavours.

Abductions are often a precursor to other grave violations, from recruitment to mental and physical abuse and other harmful practices, such as forced marriage. They can be used in retaliation by non-State actors such as Daesh, Boko Haram and other terrorist groups that neglect children's right to education and deny their empowerment, especially that of adolescent girls, and target ethnic and religious communities. We believe that our common efforts to counter violent

extremism should also be aimed at eradicating that plague.

Resolution 2225 (2015), which we adopted today, is a very relevant tool for addressing the increasing use of abduction. But even more relevant will be its concrete implementation through the work of the Security Council and its bodies, supported by the entire international community.

As a non-permanent member of the Security Council in 2007, Italy strongly supported the inclusion of specific provisions on the protection of children in the mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations. The targeted training of United Nations personnel on children's rights remains paramount to ensuring effective peacekeeping on the ground.

Italy is continuously engaged in such efforts through our training centres. The review of peacekeeping operations will no doubt be an opportunity to provide concrete recommendations on how this important topic may be considered in planning and conducting peacekeeping operations.

Accountability at the national and international levels is also key to ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice. National authorities have the duty to enforce the rules and investigate and prosecute violations and abuses. At the same time, we must spare no effort in supporting the international criminal justice system.

Prompt action is vital so as to reduce the exposure of children to serious risk factors, while promoting and implementing long-term initiatives for the recovery and social integration of former child soldiers and victims of conflicts.

According to UNICEF, approximately 14 million children have been impacted by conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Italy pays particular attention to their condition. Last year, we allocated a total of €2 million for projects carried out by UNICEF in support of children in Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan. They included social and educational activities that involved the creation and management of child and family protective facilities. We funded programmes, such as UNICEF's "No Lost Generation" initiative, aimed at tackling child malnutrition and providing psychological assistance and support for minors and their families. In the Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq, since January 2015 we have financed assistance to young Christian and Yazidi girls who are victims of violence.

Our own lessons learned from those and other programmes have been that, in the short term, success lies in the ability to rapidly re-establish family, social and institutional protection networks and set up direct relief initiatives. Short-term success, however, is not enough. Medium- and long-term actions are crucial to safeguarding the security and development of children in situations of crisis and conflict. This requires the adoption of a multidimensional approach that is able to address the root causes of poverty, lack of education and basic services, and the militarization of societies.

Mr. Aman took the Chair.

Lastly, at this juncture, as we approach the adoption of the post-2015 agenda, allow me to reaffirm that the needs and rights of children and adolescents, particularly adolescent girls and those living in poverty or otherwise excluded, must be a cross-cutting priority in our development efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Guatemala.

Mr. Morales (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia and his delegation for having organized this open debate and for his concept note (S/2015/402, annex), which contains valuable guidance to focus our discussions today on those who are most vulnerable, that is, children. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and the representative of civil society for their very powerful briefings.

In the past year we have seen a disproportionate increase in suffering, mass abduction, violent attacks, the use of children as human shields and in suicide attacks. Such abuses are not only a violation of international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights law, but also represent an affront to our humanity, deprive our children of the hope of a better world and have devastating consequences for victims and their families, as well as the communities where they live.

There is room for improvement in the Security Council's comprehensive strategy for protection, prevention and response vis-à-vis children, who are at greater risk in armed conflict because they are the objects of abduction and recruitment by armed groups and are victims of abuse, rape and sexual exploitation. We must ensure their rehabilitation and reintegration through educational and training programmes, in

keeping with the principle of the best interests of the child and respecting the overriding status of the child as a victim.

With respect to the release of child soldiers by armed groups, this is only the first step in the process of reintegration. We must also address the resulting trauma so as to prevent any repetition of the cycle of conflict. In this respect, we urge Governments and the international community as a whole to ensure that disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes receive the resources necessary to be able to function effectively.

We welcome the fact that through the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, eight Governments have committed to putting an end to and preventing the recruitment and use of children in national security forces by the end of 2016. Accountability is crucial to preventing such serious violations and must be at the very core of national and international responses. We must ensure that the necessary political and financial support is made available so as to ensure the institutionalization and sustainability of the progress made to date. We urge those that have not yet done so to sign and endorse a United Nations action plan.

We must put an end to the military use of schools by armed groups. Initiatives such as the Lucens Guidelines can help to prevent the military use of schools and universities, as they call on both State and non-State actors to immediately cease their attacks and threats against schools and to refrain from actions that hinder children's access to education. Along these lines, we welcome the adoption of the Safe Schools Declaration, on 29 May, in Oslo, Norway.

We firmly condemn the use of explosive weapons in densely populated urban areas, because this increases the vulnerability of children, resulting in an increased number of deaths and incidents of mutilation, as well as prolonged suffering, destruction and chaos. We must incorporate provisions concerning the protection of children in ceasefire negotiations as well as peace agreements.

We also unreservedly condemn the appalling acts committed by extremist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Boko Haram, as well as the mass abductions of children carried out in recent months in Nigeria, Syria and Iraq. We reiterate our call for the immediate release of the boys and girls who are still being held captive. In that context, we support the addition of child abduction as one of the violations that could trigger listing within the annexes to the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict.

While Guatemala believes that in these reports the emphasis should be placed on the victims rather than on the countries involved, we deem regrettable the inconsistencies contained in the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/409), because the serious human rights violations perpetrated against children in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel are not mentioned in the annex to that document. We must be the voice of the voiceless and ensure for them the protection and justice that they deserve. In some cases, such as that of Colombia, we have seen tangible progress in the quest for peace that will benefit the most vulnerable and that our region welcomes.

I wish to highlight the importance of Member States improving their cooperation at every level through the sharing of intelligence and information so as to develop best practices to prevent, document and address violations against children in armed conflict.

The fight against impunity must remain a pivotal aspect of our efforts, not only in the context of reacting to grave violations against children but also in preventing them.

We must take advantage of and improve the tools available to the Council and use them consistently so as to ensure that those responsible are brought to justice, by including them in sanctions regimes, redoubling our efforts to enhance national capacities in the judicial sector and strengthening the international justice framework by, inter alia, referring perpetrators to the International Criminal Court.

The sentencing of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo and the referral to the Court of the Bosco Ntaganda case are clear messages concerning the penal consequences of child recruitment, which is considered a war crime. We are in favour of strengthening our dialogue with the Court and its mandate in this area.

We call on the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to ensure that the armed groups listed in the annexes to his annual report are informed of such listings and ensure that action plans are implemented that are aimed at putting an end to such violations. We also call upon all Member States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three optional Protocols.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine.

Mrs. Zerkal (Ukraine): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for Malaysia's initiative to hold this important debate. Let me also express my gratitude to today's briefers, in particular to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict for her hard work.

The delegation of Ukraine aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union and would also like to make a number of points in its national capacity.

Ukraine welcomes the latest report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409). We consider this document to be an extremely important tool in preventing children from engaging in conflict.

Unfortunately, as stated in the report, there were unprecedented challenges in 2014 with regard to the protection of the tens of millions of children growing up in situations affected by conflict. It also notes that mass abductions of civilians, including children, have become an increasingly prevalent feature of conflict in many situations. We regret to say that our country has been suffering from such outrageous acts for more than a year as a result of Russia's ongoing aggression.

Despite the fact that the current report of the Secretary-General's does not cover the situation in Ukraine, I would like to draw the Council's attention to some striking statistics previously unimaginable in my country. As a result of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is constantly growing. As of June, Ukrainian authorities have reported more than 1,325,000 IDPs, 150,481 of them children. As of 31 March 2015, 1,086 children had lost their parents. At least 68 children have been killed and 176 wounded in eastern Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian Federation's aggression. The human rights mission in Ukraine and the World Health Organization believe that the actual number of fatalities is considerably higher.

Seven children's hospitals and three schools have been destroyed in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions as a result of shelling, and 47 medical facilities and 177 educational institutions have been heavily damaged. The whole world is witnessing, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission has confirmed, that it is Russian-backed terrorists who stand behind the murders of Ukrainian children. There have also been abductions and illegal transfers of children to Russia. For example, 61 orphans were abducted on 26 July 2014 from an orphanage in Luhansk and illegally transferred to Russia. A group of 16 children was allegedly abducted and transferred to Russian Federation territory on 12 June 2014 by armed groups and returned to Ukraine on 13 June 2014.

Rising concerns about abductions were expressed during an open debate of the Security Council in March 2015 (see S/PV.7400). Yet Ukrainian authorities, along with the OSCE monitors, have continued to report numerous incidents of child abductions by Russian-backed terrorists. According to current data, 126 occupants of the Krasnodon regional orphanage, of whom 80 are children, are still being held in the zone controlled by militants. Most of those in the institution are seriously ill and are not able to move on their own. The 195 people in the Rovenky regional orphanage, of which 27 are children, have also not been evacuated. In addition, two children's tuberculosis facilities in the city of Alchevsk cannot be evacuated from the zone affected by the conflict. Horrific facts have confirmed the cynical and manipulative attitude of the militants towards children. Decree No. 17 of the so-called Council of Ministers of the Donetsk People's Republic, dated 25 June 2014, forbids moving children outside the Donetsk region, although the same decree allows children to be moved exclusively to the Russian Federation.

Furthermore, Russian-backed terrorists are reportedly recruiting child soldiers to fight against the Ukrainian army and Ukrainian people. Many such facts have been registered by the OSCE monitoring mission. Among those manning the checkpoint at the north-eastern entrance to Shyrokyne in the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, the monitoring mission reported seeing young female and male armed persons. Some of the male individuals appeared to be minors. At a checkpoint on the outskirts of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic-controlled city of Makiivka, 10 kilometres east of Donetsk, OSCE monitors observed a child, approximately 12 to 14 years old, wearing a camouflage uniform and holding an AK-47 rifle.

Against such a tragic background, I would like to take this opportunity to urge, as we have time and again, the Russian Federation to stop providing weapons, military equipment, financial resources and mercenaries to the

illegal armed groups in eastern Ukraine. I would like to stress that the outrageous accusation made today by the representative of the Russian delegation that the Ukrainian army was allegedly killing children in the eastern region of Ukraine is indeed a brutal attempt to lay the blame at someone else's door. The United Nations and other international actors should be granted full access to the conflict zone in order to monitor the situation. That is the only way to prevent the further suffering of our children in the territories in the Donbas currently under the control of the terrorists.

At the same time, my country reiterates its commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child and will work as hard as possible to support the efforts being exerted to that end within the framework of the United Nations system, regional organizations and civil society in support of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. In that regard, we are ready to provide the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict with all available data on the situation with respect to children in Ukraine and the violations of their rights as a result of foreign aggression, so that they can be properly reflected in the next thematic report.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): Let me express the appreciation of the Brazilian delegation to you, Mr. President, for presiding over this meeting and for convening this very important debate. I am also grateful to the Secretary-General, to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui, to UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Yoka Brandt and to Ms. Eunice Apio for their briefings.

While the Security Council framework for the protection of children affected by armed conflict has been decisively reinforced since the turn of the twenty-first century, more needs to be done in terms of implementation and accountability. Every year, thousands of vulnerable and innocent girls and boys still bear the brunt of wars fought by adults. Brazil resolutely condemns all acts of violence against children in situations of armed conflict and expects all violators to be brought to justice. We are particularly concerned by the alarming reports that certain parties that have committed serious violations against girls and boys in the context of war may have been omitted from the lists in the annex to the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) as a consequence of what many would consider undue political pressure. It is of paramount importance that the Office of the Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict be allowed to exercise its responsibilities with independence and objectivity, free from politicization and within the mandate established by the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The abduction of innocent children during armed conflicts is often linked to some of the worst human-rights abuses, including sexual slavery, enslavement, hostage-taking, enforced disappearances, forcible population transfers and child recruitment. Those violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity under the Rome Statue of the International Criminal Court. They are also tragically frequent. Let me recall that over 24,000 child abductions during conflicts have been reported since 2002. While the crime of abduction is already proscribed under international humanitarian and human-rights law and has been included among the six grave violations against children established by the Council, we believe there is still room for strengthening our legal and political framework to tackle serious violations.

Mrs. Adnin took the Chair.

Brazil therefore supports the inclusion of child abduction among the listing criteria for the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict. That would send a strong signal to all would-be perpetrators that abducting girls and boys is unacceptable conduct under any circumstance. We expect this issue to be addressed in all future action plans aimed at preventing violence against children to be signed by the parties in a conflict situation.

An area in which we are achieving progress, notwithstanding recent tragic and alarming cases, is the imperative to prevent attacks against educational facilities, as well as their use for military purposes. Brazil was pleased to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, signed in Oslo last month, in which 38 countries agreed to abide by the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

As we discuss practical ways to further develop our legal tools to protect children from the impact of war, allow me to recall the essential distinction between armed conflicts, on the one hand, and situations of domestic law enforcement, on the other. While both

categories are considered in detail in the annual report, they should not be amalgamated in any way, because they pertain to different domains. Armed conflicts and situations that represent a threat to international peace and security, as established by the Council, are subject to the norms of international humanitarian law, such as the obligation on all parties to protect civilians, including girls and boys. Issues of internal law enforcement, however, fall clearly outside the purview of the Security Council and should be tackled by Governments through national legislation and international cooperation, with international human-rights law — including the Convention on the Rights of the Child — as the paradigm to be followed.

Like others who spoke before me, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict herself in her statement today, I would like to mention Colombia, the only Latin American country to be referred to in the annual report. We believe that Colombia's efforts to develop policies to protect children in armed conflict while at the same time conducting peace negotiations should be acknowledged by the United Nations and, perhaps, better reflected in future reports.

The five most deadly conflicts for children in 2014, according to the annual report, were those of Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Darfur. There is an underlying pattern in that dismal list. Most of those hostilities could have been avoided through inclusive dialogue, peaceful negotiations, good offices and other diplomatic measures. Conflict prevention remains the most ethical and effective approach to shielding all civilians, including children, from the plight of war. Conversely, inconsistent strategies that prioritize the use of force tend to aggravate the suffering of those whom we ought to protect. That reasoning is also relevant to our joint efforts against terrorism and violent extremism conducive to terrorism. We believe that the international community should focus its efforts on addressing the root causes that lead to the emergence of such extremist groups.

We agree with the Secretary-General's assessment that:

> "Recognizing and addressing social deprivation and alienation of communities, strengthening efforts to grant access to education and other key social services will contribute to isolating the leaders of extremist groups through delegitimizing their discourse and reducing the numbers who willingly enlist." (*S/2015/409, para. 16*)

The Peacebuilding Commission can play a key role in promoting policies in countries emerging from conflict so as to foster social cohesion and thereby render children and youth less vulnerable to recruitment and abuse, including by terrorist groups.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate my country's enduring commitment to the advancement of the children and armed conflict agenda in the Security Council and also to the wider debate, in various forums, on the protection of all girls and boys who suffer from violence and abuse. This crosscutting concern must be at the heart of all activities and endeavours of the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Colombia.

Mrs. Mejía Vélez (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank you, Madam President, and your country for holding this important debate. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the representative of UNICEF, and Ms. Eunice Apio for her testimony.

In March, we met here in the Council to discuss the serious human-rights violations affecting children (see S/PV.7414), and the enormous concern over the worsening situation in many parts of the world was palpable. Today, four months later, despite the efforts and involvement of the international community, we see in the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) that the situation in that regard is referred to as unprecedented. That shows us how great the present challenge is. In this difficult global context, Colombia, which is not on the Security Council's list, is, however, mentioned in the report, as a result of the prolonged internal conflict, lasting over five decades, which has affected our development and our civilian population, particularly the most vulnerable segment of it — our children.

Three years ago, President Juan Manuel Santos and the entire nation courageously sought a negotiated end to the conflict, the sole one in the Americas. That enabled the Government to implement pioneering legislation at the international level, reflected in the Law on Victims and Land Restitution and the joint agreement on clearing anti-personnel mines. Moreover, we have made progress on three out of the five items on the agenda of the peace talks, and have subsequently

improved the living conditions of the civilian population. As the Special Representative mentioned, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia announced that they would remove children younger than 15 years of age from their ranks. That is why my country is deeply perplexed by our country's portrayal in the Secretary-General's report. It does not reflect the present situation, nor the progress achieved. The terms used to describe the situation in Colombia in 2014 cannot be the same as those that would have applied in 1999. Challenged by enormous difficulties, we have taken brave steps in the peace negotiations, because we see that as the best way to restore the rights of all persons affected by the armed conflict — especially our children.

Less than a year ago, in August 2014, I was here at the United Nations for the official presentation of the Secretary General's Guidance Note on reparations for conflict-related sexual violence (see S/2014/181), in which Colombia was held up as a paradigm for the efforts that it has implemented. In the Note, the implementation of our historic law regarding victims was recognized as an effort without precedent in the context of armed conflicts elsewhere in the world. Those developments complement the public policies implemented by the Colombian Government. I would like to mention just two examples.

First, Colombia had a great number of displaced persons, but the country has made every effort to deal with the problem and its impact on our children. Furthermore, I would point out that during the period under review in the report, our country reported a noteworthy reduction of 47 per cent in the phenomenon of internally displaced persons. That reduction has not been referred to in the report.

Secondly, in 2014, the Intersectoral Commission for the Prevention of Recruitment, which involves 27 State agencies, implemented urgent prevention and protection measures, given the risk of the recruitment of girls and boys in more than 200 municipalities in Colombia. In September 2014, I addressed the Council on that very issue. I said,

> "[m]y task ... is to build up a harmonious and stable relationship of mutual respect with the [United Nations] system through which it can be possible to improve conditions on the ground, so that Colombia ... is never again included in the Secretary-General's report on this issue." (*S/PV.7259, pp. 31-32*)

Colombia and my delegation have done everything possible to achieve that goal. We have opened all channels of communication: we have promoted meetings with all relevant authorities; we have approached the Office of the Special Representative with openness: and, in that spirit, we would respectfully ask the Special Representative to take full account of the substantive considerations of the Colombian State reflected in the current report, which we hope to see corrected in the final draft. We have made significant progress in protecting our children and ensuring their rights. We will continue working with full determination and conviction to that end.

Dialogue and cooperation are undoubtedly the best tools available to the United Nations for working with States. I therefore reiterate that the Colombian State is completely prepared to continue to make progress in this area within a respectful relationship based on accuracy and objectivity. I would also reiterate to you, Mr. President, our determination to work for the good of the children of Colombia and the whole world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Mukerji (India): We would like to thank our briefers in this debate and to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June. On this day I would also like to convey our greetings to you at the start of the month of Ramadan.

As is evident from the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) on the topic before us, despite the progress in United Nations peacekeeping initiatives and the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, tens of millions of children continue to be the worst affected in situations of armed conflict. Extreme violence against susceptible children, including shocking cases of abductions in some parts of the world in 2014, call for greater political will and constructive dialogue among all the relevant stakeholders to address the worsening situation. We believe that constructive and close engagement with the national Governments concerned is essential and integral to establishing durable peace, security and development.

The impunity of non-State armed groups and newly emerging extremist organizations that violate the rights of the child can be overcome only through resolute action by the Governments on whose territory such entities operate. The international community must extend all

possible assistance to such Governments to strengthen their national capacities to deal effectively with this threat. We are of the view that sustained capacity-building in national institutions and governance should be a key focus area. It is also our firm belief that credible and verifiable data for any monitoring and reporting mechanisms can most effectively be collected by such national institutions.

On the basis of our extensive experience, acquired over six decades of United Nations peacekeeping, we feel that the allocation of more resources to peace operations and the deployment of the necessary number of child protection advisers is a prerequisite for the success of programmes designed to protect, reintegrate and rehabilitate child victims and survivors. Such allocation should be facilitated in consultation with both the national Governments and the peace operations concerned.

The concept note (S/2015/402, annex) and the Secretary-General's report refer to abductions as trigger violations. India condemns the use of abduction, which we view as a tactic of terror. While abductions are to be condemned, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Secretary-General's report must not exceed the terms of Article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations. We are concerned about reported attempts to exert undue political pressure in the process of compiling this report. With regard to the list, the overriding objective should be to have listing and delisting carried out in a transparent and judicious manner under the close supervision of Member States.

India, for its part, has engaged constructively in the ongoing efforts to make the work of the United Nations more relevant and effective in addressing the issue of children and armed conflict. We are party to all the relevant major international instruments, which demonstrates our commitment in that regard. We are disappointed that, although the Secretary-General's mandate regarding children and armed conflict is clearly spelled out in paragraph 16 of resolution 1379 (2001), his report continues to include references to other situations of concern, which cannot be considered to "threaten the maintenance of international peace and security" as set out in Article 99 of the Charter. Any consideration of such references by the Security Council will, we feel, only distract its attention from issues that actually fall within its mandate.

In conclusion, we would like all States Members of the United Nations to give explicit priority to the prevention of destructive and grave violations against susceptible children as we prepare to adopt an ambitious and far-reaching post-2015 development agenda in September.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I have the honour to speak on behalf of Finland, Iceland, Norway and my own country, Sweden.

At the outset, we would like to warmly thank the Malaysian presidency, and particularly the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dato Sri Anifah Aman, for taking the initiative of holding this open debate and for showing leadership on this important topic. We would also like to acknowledge the crucial role played by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, and her Office, as well as the important work of UNICEF and other United Nations agencies, and non-governmental organizations in the field. We would like to thank the Secretary-General and the other keynote speakers for their valuable contributions this morning.

In 2015 we celebrate the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005). The unprecedented challenges we see today for the protection of children growing up in countries affected by conflict illustrate the enormous importance of that resolution. We very much welcome today's adoption of resolution 2225 (2015), which we are all proud to sponsor.

The Secretary-General's annual report (S/2015/409) paints a very gloomy picture of the situation around the world for children in armed conflict. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has been listed as committing all the trigger violations involving violence against children, a result of their appalling atrocities. In Syria, the systematic use of indiscriminate aerial weapons, such as barrel bombs, accounts for the overwhelming majority of civilian casualties, including children. This cannot be allowed to continue. In addition, during the hostilities in Gaza last summer, civilians, including children, bore the brunt of the suffering. At least 540 Palestinian children were killed and hospitals and schools, including United Nations facilities, were severely damaged or destroyed. The scale of the impact on children was unprecedented and unacceptable.

These facts and all other incidents listed in the report are profoundly disturbing and raise serious concerns regarding the observance of the rules of international humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality, and respect for international human rights law, including, let it be said, in the Security Council.

Given that armed non-State actors account for the vast majority of violations, further reflection on forms of engagement is needed. In thata regard, we thought that interesting proposals were presented at the open debate presided over by France in March (see S/PV.7414).

In 2014, the world bore witness to several appalling cases of mass abduction of children in armed conflict. We therefore particularly welcome the addition of abduction as a fifth trigger violation in the report, which we hope will send a strong signal to all parties to armed conflict around the world.

I want to highlight three areas of particular concern to us.

First, the right of children, particularly girls, to high-quality education in war and disasters is vital to the protection of children during conflict, because attendance at school can create a sense of normality and a vision for a better future in an otherwise chaotic situation. It is therefore all the more disturbing that there were attacks on education facilities in at least 70 countries between 2009 and 2013. Since then, the problem has only escalated in a number of conflicts. We must intensify our efforts to uphold the right to education, even in conflict situations. By making schools safer for children today, we are protecting the future. The Safe Schools Declaration expresses a commitment to protecting education from attack. It merits our full consideration and we hope that it will be endorsed by as many States as possible. We are also concerned by the severe impact on children of the continued use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Such indiscriminate use of weapons is prohibited under international humanitarian law and we would support practical steps to stop it.

Secondly, there is still a lack of accountability for violations of international law committed against children in armed conflict. It is crucial to fight impunity and ensure that victims have access to justice. Crimes against children must be independently and impartially investigated and prosecuted to the full extent of the law. Individual responsibility must be upheld; that means that all perpetrators must be held accountable and punished accordingly, regardless of their status or capacity. The Children in Armed Conflict Accountability Framework is a step in the right direction and provides a methodology to both redress past violations and prevent future violations. My own country, Sweden, will launch this tool in cooperation with the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Kinshasa this autumn. The International Criminal Court plays an important role in ensuring accountability and we welcome the initiative of the Prosecutor's Office to develop a comprehensive policy paper on children.

Thirdly, and lastly, we must have a stronger policy for protecting children's rights in peacekeeping operations. The recent serious allegations in the Central African Republic bear tragic witness to that. It is essential that personnel deployed in the field have adequate training in the rights of the child. Two of the many steps needed could be the inclusion in all missions of child protection structures, including child protection focal points, and making predeployment training of peacekeepers in child protection mandatory.

Before concluding, we would like to once again congratulate the Special Representative and UNICEF on a successful first year of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. They have our wholehearted support, but, as today's debate has shown, we have a lot of work in front of us.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria.

Mr. Boukadoum (Algeria): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Arab Group.

The Security Council is holding this very important open debate a few days after N'Djamena, the capital of Chad, was stricken by heinous terrorist attacks that resulted in many dead and wounded, including children. I would like to express our sincere condolences and deep sympathy to the families of the victims, and our solidarity with the Chadian authorities.

I would also like to congratulate Malaysia on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and on its organization of today's debate on children and armed conflict. I wish to commend the work of the President in his capacity as Chair of the Working Group on this very issue. I would like also to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2015/409)

on global trends related to the situation of children in armed conflict. Our special thanks go to Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for her briefing and for her steadfast, faithful and continued commitment to the cause of children.

The Arab Group would like to emphasize some principles and elements that we deem extremely important in dealing with the present issue. Above all, we cannot support any difference of opinion when children and their well-being and future are at stake. Regardless of the situation, location or political differences between States, or even in situations of open conflict, children should be protected. That is a moral and legal obligation.

We now have criteria that can be used to define when a child is a victim and when violations are committed, and it is a fundamental principle that we must act on that — "we" meaning the international community, and above all the Security Council, with the Secretary-General as a whistleblower. The Secretary-General has a responsibility to tell, and the Security Council has a responsibility to act. Children's playgrounds must be in their schoolyards and secure homes, not in battlefields. Regardless of their religion, citizenship, ethnicity or social position, we should make no distinction. Children are children, and we should ensure that they do not become victims, soothe them when required and reconstruct their future when necessary. Children must remain off limits with regard to adults' quagmires.

We continue to witness the increasing recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, including acts of sexual violence, killings, attacks on schools and/or hospitals and recurring attacks or threats of attacks on protected personnel, in violation of international legal standards. This year, as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), we should note that significant progress has been made in seeking the cooperation and compliance of national security forces on this issue, since almost all of them now have their own action plans for addressing it. However, we should also note that this did not stop children from being the primary victims of conflicts in 2014.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

As we mark the first anniversary of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, and despite the significant efforts of Governments and agencies of the United Nations to demonstrate the harmful effects of terrorist acts on children, this negative trend continues to grow. The Arab Group believes the Security Council should consider the possibility of expanding the criteria for inscribing names of the perpetrators of such crimes in the lists annexed to the Secretary-General's report. Abduction is one of the criminal actions used by extremist groups in various countries to intimidate or influence local ethnic or religious communities. Girls in particular are victims of sexual slavery and other indescribable violations. They are deprived of an education, raped and forced into marriage. The recent savage attacks on and abductions of girls by Boko Haram and Daesh and the selling of girls to terrorist fighters are other challenges we must overcome.

With regard to peacekeeping operations, the Arab Group calls for the inclusion of child protection advisers in the mission mandates. They must be on the ground to ensure that children affected by armed conflict are protected as they should be in the framework of peacekeeping operations. We must submit reports on those efforts.

The issue of the collective abduction of civilians, including children, is one that we are seeing increasingly in situations of armed conflict. The abduction of children leads to other violations, such as murder, maiming, recruitment and sexual violence. The Arab Group condemns such violations committed against children in Syria and Iraq by the terrorist group Daesh, which murders, rapes and forcibly displaces children, as well as denying them access to education by closing schools and using them for combat purposes.

While the Council is looking at the issue of children and armed conflict around the world, the Arab Group urges it not to forget the children of Palestine, who are suffering under acts of aggression and oppression and grave violations of human rights owing to the Israeli occupation. That conflict has been going on for more than 70 years, and Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to seriously violate international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant Security Council resolutions. That situation systematically exhibits three of the six criteria for evaluating violations against children. The war in Gaza last year resulted in the deaths of more than 500 Palestinian children who were targeted and killed deliberately as they played on the beach or sought refuge in United Nations centres. Around 3,000 children were disabled for life, schools

were attacked, 54,000 children left homeless, and at least 373,000 children in Gaza are now in need of psychological and social support. None of what was destroyed has been rebuilt yet.

The Arab Group reiterates its confidence in Special Representative Zerrougui, which it demonstrated recently when the League of Arab States and the United Nations signed an agreement aimed at strengthening the protection of children affected by armed conflict in the Arab world. It constitutes an important measure to ensure the protection of children. The Arab Group believes it is essential that the mandate of the Office of the Special Representative be strengthened by providing the financial and human resources it requires.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I would like to wish a blessed Ramadam to all. I salute His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, Mr. Anifah Aman, and the President of the Security Council for convening this timely debate on children and armed conflict. This matter is of highest priority and urgency for the State of Palestine, whose children's lives are gravely endangered by the Israeli occupation. I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF; and Ms. Eunice Apio, Director of Facilitation for Peace and Development, for their important briefings.

We come before the Security Council anguished by the Secretary-General's decision to exclude Israel from the list of shame of parties committing grave violations against children in his annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409). Israel, the occupying Power, is without doubt a flagrant violator of children's rights. Israel systematically commits crimes against Palestinian children. Its actions contravene its obligations under human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international humanitarian law, which obligate the occupying Power to ensure the well-being and safety of the civilian population under its occupation. Evidence verified by the United Nations and numerous human rights organizations affirms that Israel continues to kill and maim children, attack schools and hospitals and prevent humanitarian access, with devastating impact on the rights, lives and well-being of Palestinian children. Those facts are well documented in the current report and similar past reports.

According to the criteria established by the Security Council, such actions would trigger a listing among the grave violators identified in the annexes to the report. One qualifies to be on the list of shame whether Boko Haram figures there or not. If one meets the criteria, then one has to be there. Political considerations should not be the basis for removal because some abhorrent terrorist organization is on the list.

Yet Israel was not included in that list, as political pressures were again blatantly exerted to shield it from censure and measures of accountability, notwithstanding the objective recommendation of the experts in the United Nations system. We salute those experts for their professional and honest position. They recommended Israel's inclusion, but political pressure led to the deletion of Israel from the list of shame. This glaring omission and the failure to hold Israel responsible for its crimes come at a heavy cost to our innocent children, who are being denied the protection of the law, their rights violated, their suffering deepened and their lives, dreams and futures shattered, without consequences.

Israel's brutality increased against Palestinian children in 2014, causing the third-highest number of child fatalities in armed conflicts worldwide. As reported, 557 Palestinian children were killed. My statement, which will be circulated, contains an annex with a list with the names of all those children and their ages. The majority are from the Gaza Strip, who were killed during the Israeli military assaults of July and August 2014. There are 340 boys and 200 girls, from one-week-old babies to youth 17 years old. As time constraints do not allow me to read out the names of all of those beloved children to properly memorialize their lives and souls, we are distributing the list of their names with the copies of our statement today.

The Palestinian people still grieve this massive loss of human life and innocence. Among them are 19 children of the Abu Jama'a family, the youngest a 6-month-old girl, Bisan, who were massacred in an Israeli air strike on their home that killed 25 family members in total. They suffered the same disaster inflicted on 142 families who lost multiple members — mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins — in such criminal assaults, with 89 families totally decimated.

The grim reality is that the Israeli occupying forces killed an average of 10 children per day in Gaza, most of whom had not yet celebrated their twelfth birthday. Children were killed on beaches as they played in broad daylight before the eyes of the world, in the sanctity of their homes, in their beds as they slept, in schools, in playgrounds, in the arms of their parents who could not save them from the Israeli onslaught. And an estimated 3,000 children were injured and maimed by the deliberate Israeli strikes and bombardments of civilian areas. One thousand of those children will be disabled for life. These facts, documented and verified by United Nations agencies on the ground, cannot be disputed, distorted or justified by any shameless propaganda.

In addition to these horrific facts, 1,218 Palestinian children were injured in 2014 by the occupying forces in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, more than half of whom were under 12 years of age. Many were critically wounded, and 13 were killed. Among them were Mohammed Abu Khdeir, aged 16, who was abducted and burned alive by terrorist settlers, and Nadim Siam Nuwara, aged 17, who was killed as he was returning home from school during the Day of Nakba in May 2014. I am honoured to have his father here with us today as we appeal again to the Security Council to act to redress the crimes perpetrated against his son and our people and to bring an end to this 48 years of illegal occupation and decades of injustice.

Moreover, along with rampant Israeli strikes on hospitals and homes that have caused death and injury to children, the report indicates that Israeli attacks damaged or destroyed 543 schools in Palestine, the highest recorded number of all time. This includes schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, where many Palestinian families, the majority of whom were refugees seeking protection under the United Nations flag, met a tragic fate at the hands of the occupying forces, who killed at least 42 people, including 16 children, and injured 230 in strikes on the schools.

Generations of Palestinian children have been traumatized by the depravity of the Israeli occupation. As noted by the Secretary-General in the report,

> "The cumulative impact on children and the civilian population in general of these military operations, and the ongoing military occupation in the State of Palestine, is devastating" (*S/2015/409, para. 110*).

The average 8-year-old in Gaza has witnessed three acts of major military aggression but has never set foot outside Gaza. Too many young lives have been cut short by the violence and terror of the occupying forces and extremist settler militants, who, along with the Israeli Government, should be included in the list of violators, the list of shame.

The children who survive this constant aggression are left to cope with deep physical and psychological wounds, which gravely impairs their lives. Those wounds result from the loss of family members, with at least 1,500 children orphaned in the last Israeli war alone. There have been detentions and arrests, with children as young as 12 seized from their beds in the dead of night, detained, interrogated, beaten, blindfolded, strip-searched, forced to endure solitary confinement and other acts amounting to torture and prosecuted in the only juvenile military court system in the world. There is also the illegal blockade by which Israel has inhumanely deprived the Palestinians in Gaza, isolated them from the world and obstructed humanitarian assistance and recovery. Forced displacement has been endured repeatedly by many children, with the destruction of their homes and loss of their life possessions.

Where else in the world would such deplorable treatment of children be permitted? How long will the Security Council allow Israel to act as a State above the law, perpetrating such grave violations against children with impunity?

This shameful situation renders meaningless the law and the obligation to protect civilians in armed conflict, and the accountability mechanisms established for this purpose. The failure to apply the same standards and demands for compliance to Israel undermines the credibility of the international system and proves that it is broken. This accountability gap clearly fosters Israeli impunity, as shown in its callous response to the report and the persistence of its violations against our children, who are left to fend for themselves against Israeli savagery. As the Council knows, had Israel been added to the list of grave violators, a process of increased oversight would have been initiated. The United Nations and Israel would have had to negotiate a time-bound, mandatory action plan to protect children. Listing would also have provided the Council with the tools to prevent and respond to future Israeli violations. Israel's exclusion from the list, despite the expert advice of the Special Representative of the Secretary-

General and the United Nations agencies monitoring the situation in Palestine, is a missed opportunity to hold Israel accountable and to save the lives of Palestinian children.

In 2009, the Secretary-General came before the Council and stated that "All countries and all groups must put the protection of children in situations of armed conflict above politics." (*S/PV.6114, p. 3*). We echo that appeal today in the light of the tragic plight of Palestinian children under Israeli occupation. Israel must be held accountable for its crimes. We are convinced that only collective international action can compel it to cease its violations and respect the law. Our pursuit of accountability and commitment to international law are evident in our accession to the Rome Statute and other international treaties. While the Israeli Government continues to demonstrate in word and deed that it has no interest in peace and the rule of law and insists on denying the Palestinian people their rights and entrenching its occupation, the Palestinian leadership remains committed to peace.

To salvage the prospects for peace, we implore the international community, with the Security Council at the forefront, to act to uphold international law and United Nations resolutions towards ending Israel's illegal occupation and achieving freedom and justice for the Palestinian people. Until then, we again appeal for protection of the Palestinian people, beginning with our children.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to begin by congratulating Malaysia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council and for organizing this open debate in a timely manner on the very important matter of children and armed conflict. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for presenting his annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409), which covers global trends on the subject. My thanks go also to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and the other briefers for their valuable inputs to this debate.

The year 2014 was sadly one in which we saw many setbacks in the fight to protect children in armed conflict. As the recent report of the Secretary-General and other reports in the United Nations system on this issue indicat, that year was an especially horrific one for children trapped in conflict zones and targeted by warring factions and belligerent entities with no respect for international humanitarian law and the welfare of our children. Current world events indicate that children are suffering in massive numbers as a result of armed conflicts. It is most deplorable that armed conflicts continue to take a heavy toll on children.

The progress made on this front has unfortunately been more than overshadowed by the exacerbation of conflicts and an increase in indiscriminate attacks in some countries of our region. At the same time, we have witnessed the proliferation and growth of extremist groups that systemically violate the rights of children. Those extremist groups pose a significant challenge for our region. They perpetrate acts of violence against children, launch indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations, target schools and health facilities and abduct children in large numbers.

The trend of violent extremists infringing on the rights of children should be of particular concern to the international community. The nature of those groups and their form and structure mean that many standards and proven methods used by the international community to protect children may be considerably less effective, if not futile. The complete disregard for civilians, including children, by Daesh, Jabhat Al-Nusra and Al-Qaida affiliates, especially in Syria and Iraq, has been particularly shocking, and the proliferation of these tactics among such groups is worrisome.

Violent extremists have adopted widespread abduction as a feature of their operations to inflict terror and for the purpose of political brainwashing, ransom, retaliation or sexual exploitation. The Boko Haram gangs have been ravaging the parts of Nigeria and surrounding areas primarily by terrorizing children. The targeting of the children of religious and ethnic minority groups is likewise a matter of grave concern.

The situation of children in Yemen is worrisome as well. According to UNICEF reports, at least 279 of the dead and 402 of the wounded have been children. That marks an exponential and unacceptable jump compared to the entire year of 2014 and makes clear that the intensity of the conflict in Yemen can lead to humanitarian crises for some time to come. The systematic bombing and destruction of the logistical infrastructure of a country that imports 90 per cent of its food, for example, will undoubtedly have long-term consequences.

As the Secretary-General's report indicates, and as evidenced in reports by United Nations agencies, in Gaza alone, between 8 July and 26 August 2014, 540 Palestinian children were killed and 2,955 injured, among them 1,000 estimated to be permanently disabled as a result of the latest Israeli invasion. The number of schools, kindergartens and hospitals damaged or completely destroyed by Israeli forces during the same period is the highest recorded number of all such situations in 2014. Israel's denial of humanitarian access to the entire occupied Palestinian people endangers the survival and well-being of Palestinian children, which adds yet another record for the Israeli regime's ignoring international humanitarian law without being held accountable for its grave violations against children.

We would like to take this opportunity to call for accountability for the war crimes and violations committed by Israel during its recent military aggression against the Palestinian civilian population and for the wanton destruction of vital civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. The international community, including the Security Council, should ensure serious follow-up efforts to bring an end to Israel's impunity and to secure justice for the victims.

The Security Council has identified six specific criteria for grave violations that the Secretary-General should use to update his lists of grave violators against children in armed conflicts around the world, contained in the annexes of his reports. The overwhelming evidence indicates that systematic and gross human right violations perpetrated by the Israeli regime and army against Palestinian children under its occupation clearly meet those criteria for listing. We therefore join the many Member States that deeply regret the decision not to list Israel in the annex of the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, despite the recommendation of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in that regard.

Warring parties must make greater efforts to protect children from conflict. Respect by all parties for the civilian nature of schools, the inclusion of policies regarding the rights of children in peace talks and treaties, and the regular institution of humanitarian pauses in the fighting can be significant steps towards achieving that aim. The international community must redouble its efforts to protect children in conflict by taking a more aggressive stance against those who are persistent perpetrators and those who abduct and victimize children. Nations need to show greater leadership in countering the propaganda of violent extremism, used for both the recruitment of children in faraway places and the indoctrination of abductees, as well as in protecting, rehabilitating and reintegrating children saved from the grips of those elements.

Without strong action from the United Nations and a genuine commitment from the community of nations, this issue will have significant consequences and ripple through generations. As the targeting of children has become a growing trend among violent extremists and an ever more prevalent feature of violent conflict, the world should expect this issue to only grow more brutal if it is not blunted by the will of the international community.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to keep their statements concise in view of the long speakers list.

I now give the floor to the representative of Liechtenstein.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): We welcome this debate and extend a special welcome to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, who is with us throughout the debate today. We very much appreciate and value her work and the work of her Office.

The Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) once again shines a light on the many ways in which children are affected by armed conflict, on the increasing number of horrendous crimes committed against them and on the perpetrators of this violence. We support many of the recommendations in the report, in particular the one on the need to include abductions of children as a trigger mechanism for listing. My brief intervention will focus on three points today.

First, we are pleased to see a strong call for accountability among the recommendations. It is of the utmost importance to demand full respect for international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. We are concerned about the sexual exploitation and abuse case in the Central African Republic and the systemic weaknesses within the United Nations system it has brought to light. We welcome the Secretary-General's decision to establish an independent investigation and look forward to its results. Thirty per cent of the victims of reported cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping missions in Haiti, Liberia, South Sudan

and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were minors. The United Nations proclaimed zero-tolerance policy will be ineffective as long as accountability mechanisms remain opaque or simply not in place and reporting remains difficult or even dangerous.

The challenges in ensuring accountability for sexual exploitation and abuse have been discussed for many years, but with few tangible results. There is a persistent danger that the important work of so many could be publicly discredited owing to the unethical and criminal acts committed with impunity by a few. Troop-contributing countries have to ensure speedy domestic investigations and prosecutions for violations committed by their nationals. Otherwise, the United Nations role and its crucial function in the area of peacekeeping will be compromised.

Secondly, the list of perpetrators in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports can be a very powerful tool to influence the behaviour of parties to a conflict. However, for this to be the case, the listing and delisting process needs to be fair, consistent and transparent. The vast majority of parties listed are non-State actors, with whom it can be difficult to engage. The International Committee of the Red Cross and certain non-governmental organizations, such as Geneva Call, are uniquely positioned in that regard, and their experience should inform the Council's work in this area.

Some parties to conflicts seem to have made clear commitments to engage, are eager to cooperate and have signed so called deeds of commitment to stop violations against children. Nevertheless, not a single non-State actor/entity has been able to qualify for delisting so far, due, inter alia, to a lack of knowledge and assistance throughout the process. This has caused frustration and is also a missed opportunity to motivate other non-State actors to cooperate with a view to delisting. It is therefore important to support organizations that assist non-State actors in their efforts to achieve delisting. We as Governments can further facilitate such processes through the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which creates the necessary framework for engagement.

Finally, I would like to briefly touch upon the issue of underage foreign terrorist fighters. We are obviously struggling to find a response to this complex phenomenon. Our knowledge of the root causes, motivation and recruitment policies and processes is still limited. We must not forget in this discussion that we are talking about children, whose judgment and resulting behaviour is that of legal minors. We therefore look forward with great interest at so-called soft-handed approaches based on the assumption that poverty, discrimination, lack of socialization and the absence of effective integration are often at the root of radicalization. Instead of an exclusive focus on criminalization, those strategies make use of psychosocial counselling and help returnees find jobs or education opportunities. We do not claim to know that one approach works better than another, but we certainly see value in exploring a stronger focus on reintegration. What seems to be clear is that a comprehensive response is needed that covers prevention, psycho-social support and integration assistance to complement necessary legal measures and action.

In conclusion, I would like to draw the Council's attention to the Safe Schools Declaration, which endorses the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. We welcome that elaboration on existing international humanitarian law and call upon others to join those of us that have already endorsed the Guidelines at the recently held safe schools conference in Oslo.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Japan.

Mr. Okamura (Japan): I would like to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation for your leadership, Mr. President, in convening today's open debate. Let me also thank His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General; Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict; Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF; and Ms. Eunice Apio, of Facilitation for Peace and Development, for their briefings.

Today, I would like to focus on three issues: the abduction of children, child soldiers and the rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims.

First, with regard, abduction, I would like to draw the Security Council's attention to the disturbing, increasing trend of mass abductions of children. Last year, it was reported that 276 schoolgirls had been kidnapped by Boko Haram in Nigeria. There were 153 Kurdish boys and 412 Yazidi children abducted by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), in Syria

and Iraq. According to the Watch List on Children and Armed Conflict, at least 24,422 children were kidnapped between 2002 and 2013, of which 95.8 per cent were taken by non-State armed groups.

The international community, especially the Security Council, should take all the measures necessary to alleviate such cruel and inhumane actions by organizations like Boko Haram and ISIL. In that regard, we support and have sponsored the new resolution 2225 (2015), which was just adopted today. The addition of abductions as a trigger for the inclusion of parties in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report will make a difference. It is essential, however, that the relevant parties implement resolution 2225 (2015) through action plans and other mechanisms.

Moreover, Japan would like to pay tribute to the efforts made by all stakeholders in drafting the Lucens Guidelines. We welcome the fact that the international community's recognition of the issue of protecting schools and education is expanding. Japan will continue keeping an eye on the development of the discussion on the issue.

Secondly, Japan is commemorating the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005). Japan took in the adoption of the resolution as a member of the Council at the time. The resolution marked an important milestone, by establishing a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign further promotes the provisions set out in the resolution. Japan has repeatedly expressed its support to the campaign. The achievements made so far via the campaign are to be commended, including the delisting of Chad and the release of 400 child soldiers in Myanmar. In that context, Japan has provided support for child soldier victims through UNICEF. It is important to note that the goal of the campaign is to prevent and end the recruitment and use of children by national security forces by 2016. In order to achieve that ambitious goal, further enhancements and commitments are required. Japan will continue to look into furthering its contributions to support the campaign.

Lastly, the rehabilitation and reintegration of child victims deserves as much attention as the prevention of abduction and recruitment, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's current annual report (S/2015/409). The victims of child abduction and recruitment have been deprived of love and affection and remain aloof from a normal social life. In the worst cases, those children become fiends and deviants or mindless monsters, brainwashed and knowing nothing other than how to use a Kalashnikov. Those children may have no families or homes to return to. Even if they do make it back, they may not be accepted or may be unable to readapt to society. They have lost the opportunity to become members of society. Bringing such children back to a normal life should be an essential part of their rehabilitation process.

With that aim in mind, in the past fiscal year Japan provided a total of $23 million in contributions for programmes to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers. Such programmes have been implemented in countries such as the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. For instance, in South Sudan, we supported efforts to reunite approximately 1,000 children with their families. That project also provided them with psychological care. In addition, medical care and counselling are being provided to women and children who have experienced sexual abuse.

We should not leave anyone behind — especially the children. When we are dealing with crimes that have been committed against children, preventing and rescuing children from such crimes is not sufficient. I reiterate the necessity of also providing support to the victims for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. By doing so, they can return as fully committed members of society.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Mayr-Harting: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; as well as Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

I want to begin by warmly thanking in particular Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui, whom we strongly support. We also want to thank the Malaysian presidency of the Security Council for organizing this important debate.

The year 2014 has frequently been cited as the worst year for children affected by armed conflict. In his new annual report to the Council (S/2015/409), the Secretary-General speaks of "unprecedented challenges in 2014 with regard to the protection of tens of millions of children growing up in situations affected by conflict" (*S/2015/409, para. 5*). Protracted armed conflicts and current crises affect far too many children around the world, keeping them away from school and exposing them to the risk of recruitment and use as soldiers. Atrocities against children that have made headlines, including Boko Haram's abduction of hundreds of women and girls in Chibok and the abductions in Syria and Iraq committed by Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, serve to remind us of the special vulnerabilities and needs of girls in this context.

The "increase in the frequency and scale of abductions", as noted in paragraph 8 of the Secretary-General's report, is alarming. In view of that increase, but also in view of the fact that abductions are one of the six grave violations that are being reported on under the monitoring and reporting mechanism, it is only logical to add abduction as a fifth trigger that leads to listing in the annexes of the Secretary-General's report. In many cases abductions are a precursor of other violations, such as recruitment and use of sexual violence. We therefore very much welcome today's unanimous adoption of resolution 2225 (2015), which that adds abduction as a trigger, and we are grateful for Malaysia's leadership in that regard. We hope that in consequence this will lead to the conclusion of action plans with listed parties that commit abductions. We strongly condemn abductions of children and call on all parties to release all abducted children immediately.

In several cases, extremist groups have abducted school children to punish them for attending school. That serves to remind us of the importance of education not only for children's development, but also as a powerful tool to contribute to the prevention of violent extremism and of conflict. Consequently, more has to be done to better protect schools from attack and to deter the military use thereof in accordance with international law. We welcome the Council's commitment, stated inter alia in resolution 2143 (2014), for enhanced monitoring of, and reporting on, the military use of schools.

Many of the abductions are committed by non-State armed actors, which also make up the vast majority of listed parties. During the last open debate in March (see S/PV.7414), under the French presidency, we discussed possible measures to effectively address this phenomenon. We are grateful for the non-paper circulated by France that compiles a summary of the proposals presented during that debate. We believe that many of those proposals merit concrete follow-up. Unconditional access for the United Nations to non-State armed actors is essential for the adoption of action plans to end and prevent violations and, more important, for steps towards their effective implementation.

In order to prevent future violations, it is vital to hold those responsible accountable. A high number of the parties have been listed for at least five years, and are therefore considered persistent perpetrators. Fighting impunity needs to be part and parcel of our actions and, whereas the primary responsibility lies with States, the International Criminal Court has an essential role to play in this regard.

Furthermore, the inclusion of child protection provisions in the mandates of peace operations and mandatory predeployment training on child protection for all United Nations troops and police contingents are crucial measures to ensure the effective protection of children on the ground. In that context, the European Union is strengthening its capacity on child protection both at its headquarters and at operational level. We are mainstreaming the issue of children affected by armed conflict in our Common Security and Defence Policy missions and operations. This year, the Union is again organizing specific training on children and armed conflict for its staff and that of its member States. Predeployment child protection training modules for civilian and military personnel have also been finalized and are taught in the context of preparations for deployment of European Union and third-country personnel as part of the various civilian stabilization missions.

The successful reintegration of children back into society is a matter of primary concern for achieving sustainable peace and development. That is the reason that we are funding reintegration measures for released child soldiers, for example in South Sudan. This year, we plan to launch a specific call for proposals from civil society organizations on future projects on children associated with armed forces and groups as well as children impacted by violence. The European Union and its member States also continue to support the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and

UNICEF. We welcome the progress achieved so far and hope for a successful conclusion in 2016.

The tenth anniversary of the adoption of ground-breaking resolution 1612 (2005) in July this year should provide a new impetus to the United Nations and its States Members to give the protection of children affected by armed conflict the highest priority and to ensure that everything is being done to provide children with better prospects for their future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Israel.

Mr. Roet (Israel): The girls and boys of today represent the hope for a better tomorrow. When a child is a victim of war, his world, his family and his community lose their most precious possession: their hope for a brighter future. The loss of any child is an incomparable tragedy. The deliberate infliction of harm on children is an inhumane crime. Protecting children is our highest obligation.

According to the Jewish tradition, whoever saves one life it is as if he has saved the entire world. Seventy years after the establishment of this institution, there are far too many lives we fail to save. The painful fact is that children all over the world are suffering from unprecedented cruelty and inhumanity.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram has already abducted 1,000 children, many of whom were placed on the front line to act as human shields. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, civilians, including children, are being beheaded, mutilated and raped. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia's massive and indiscriminate air strikes have hit hospitals and schools and killed hundreds of civilians, including many children. The Houthis are recruiting boys as young as 14 to use as child soldiers, arming them with Kalashnikovs and sending them to the front lines. In Iraq, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is forcing young girls to call their parents to detail being gang-raped by dozens of men. In Syria, ISIS forces abducted and tortured Kurdish children and forced them to watch footage of ISIS beheadings and attacks.

When we look at the world today through the eyes of children, we see a terrifying picture. Too many dreams are being shattered, too many hopes are being extinguished and too many are robbed of their childhoods by unimaginable brutality. It must stop. The Security Council must act to end those atrocities against children. Today's resolution 2225 (2015), which Israel sponsored, is a positive step forward.

Last week, the Secretary-General published his annual report (S/2015/404) on children and armed conflict. With all the regimes, with all the organizations that intentionally and strategically target children throughout the world, it is simply absurd that the report disproportionately focuses on Israel. The report has 17 paragraphs on Syria, 9 on Yemen, 8 on Iraq, 6 on Libya and no less than 32 paragraphs on Israel. Yes, the Council heard right: twice as much space was dedicated to Israel than to Syria, where approximately a quarter of a million people have been killed, including, according to *The New York Times*, more than 3,500 children just this year, while the report misleads by inexplicably putting the number at 368.

The reason for that skewed presentation is evident. Instead of being balanced, neutral and focused on fact, the report's discussion of Israel is politicized, stained with interests and distorts reality. What about Hamas, a terrorist organization that as we speak runs military summer camps for elementary school children? Surely a report about the use of children in warfare would discuss it in detail. Well, read through the report and try to count how many times the name Hamas even appears. Finding Hamas in this report is harder than finding a needle in a haystack. In reality, Hamas and other terrorist organizations launched approximately 4,000 rockets and mortars during last summer's conflict. Those missiles were deliberately directed at Israel's civilian population. In the words of Hamas spokesman, Fawzi Barhoum,

> "Our rockets are aimed at the Hebrews, the murderers, the Israelis, the criminals. Our missiles accurately target the homes of the Israelis and the Zionists."

More than 15,000 rockets and mortars have been fired at Israel from Gaza since 2001. There is a generation of children in Israel that lives under daily threat of Hamas rockets and mortars.

Not only did Hamas deliberately target Israeli civilians and children, it also demonstrates complete disregard for the lives of Palestinian children. While Israel tried to save Palestinian lives by warning them to leave combat areas, Hamas threatened their lives if they did. While Israel takes every precaution to avoid harm to non-combatants, Hamas voids international law by launching rockets from schools, hospitals, mosques and

other places in which children would usually be safe. The military use of schools by Hamas is dreadful. As today's resolution states, such use is "in contravention of applicable international law" (*resolution 2225 (2015), para. 4*).

Omitted from the report was one clear fact: this was not a war that Israel wanted. Israel deeply regrets the harm caused to the Palestinian civilian population during Operation Protective Edge. That operation was in response to more than 450 rockets and mortars launched from the Gaza Strip, including more than 60 in just one day, while Israel did not react. Israel took all measures to de-escalate the conflict by accepting ceasefire after ceasefire, while Hamas rejected all attempts. In a war forced on Israel by Hamas Israel, took unprecedented precautions to avoid the loss of life of innocent civilians, going beyond what is required by international law and what is done by any army in the world.

The Israel Defense Forces used leaflets, phone calls and text messages to warn the civilian population to evacuate rocket launch sites. It aborted or suspended operations against terror targets when it became apparent that civilians would be harmed. And, even while attacked by the ruling authority in Gaza, Israel kept the flow of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza.

I ask myself why all of these clear and crucial facts are absent from the report of the Special Representative. Is it possible that they simply failed to notice? Unfortunately, the failure of this report goes far deeper than mere oversight. The drafting of the report was marked at every level by widespread, systematic and institutionalized biased conduct against Israel.

From the outset, the regional working group conveniently forgot to inform Israel of the writing of the report, nor did they deem it necessary to seek input from the Israeli authorities. Time after time, Israel tried to provide official evidence and facts to the working group, but we were flatly refused. Yet non-governmental organizations with a publicly available record of notorious anti-Israel activity were welcomed with open arms as an integral part of the working group.

Furthermore, the Office of the Special Representative left no real opportunity for Israel's extensive reservations to even be considered, thus making it evident that the engagement with Israel by that Office was a mere formality for the sake of checking the box. Such practices contradict the relevant Security Council resolutions and guidelines to involve Governments as an integral part throughout the process.

We are extremely troubled by the fact that internal sensitive information that was supposed to be known only to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and to United Nations officials was leaked to the press in an intentional attempt to pressure and dictate the final outcome to include Israel in the report's annex. Have members ever heard anywhere a consideration of the Special Representative with regard to listing or not listing countries except this time? Such unauthorized and irresponsible leaks should not be tolerated. They serve only to undermine the credibility of the report, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the entire United Nations system. This conduct should be investigated.

No organization is perfect, and no procedure is immune to criticism. Raising concerns with regard to the practices and procedures of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict should not be automatically perceived as mere national interest and is essential for the protection of children.

I must express as well deep concern about the report's statement that the question of intent when determining responsibility will not be a crucial consideration. The laws of armed conflict provide one of the critical barriers preventing war from descending into unrestrained barbarism. Ignoring intention would be contrary to existing international law and would play into the hands of those who intentionally target and use civilians in combat and leave children more vulnerable. Without attention to intentions, those who are responsible for harming children will remain free to repeat their crimes, and we will fail in our sacred obligation to the children of the world.

The Bible tells us that all children are a gift of God. We have an obligation to do all we can to protect the lives of the most vulnerable among us, no matter who they are or where they are from. Israel's concern for the life and well-being of children knows no colour, no ethnicity, no nationality or faith, and it knows no borders. Israel's commitment to the protection of children is absolute. We will remain committed to safeguard the lives of all children in accordance with our democratic values, our moral conscience and our belief in the sanctity of human life.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mexico.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiolea (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish to thank the delegation of Malaysia for having convened this open debate, and Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for her valuable input to the annual report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/409).

The report underscores the increase in extreme violence recorded in 2014 and its relation with the serious violations of the rights of girls and boys. This fact alone must serve to reaffirm our collective determination to keep this issue at the core of the international agenda.

Our participation today reflects the commitment of Mexico to continue to contribute to raising awareness about this issue. We did so when we chaired the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict in 2009 and 2010, which led to resolution 1882 (2009), in which the Security Council firmly condemns the abduction of children in situations of armed conflict. We also underscore the practical progress achieved on the ground, such as plans of action and the monitoring and reporting mechanism on the six serious violations committed against children.

Mexico has explicitly condemned acts carried out by extremist groups, particularly during the violent events of 2014, and it is with great concern that we note that the most recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict highlights the increase in abductions of children in conflict situations. Although the records are insufficient, the Secretary-General reports that more than 2,750 children have been abducted in 12 conflict areas. Of those cases at least 1,730 were abducted by the self-proclaimed Islamic State and 500 by Boko Haram.

The international community cannot ignore or tolerate this situation. The abduction of children may well constitute a crime against humanity and a war crime. To meet this challenge we have an extensive normative framework, such as the Geneva Conventions, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and international humanitarian law, which together establish an obligation to ensure humane treatment for civilians and attention to the specific vulnerabilities of children, including prohibiting the taking of hostages, among other things. A number of Security Council resolutions explicitly condemn attacks on schools and hospitals.

Mexico believes it is useful that in the Security Council, the United Nations and States Members reinforce our response to these serious violations, including through existing mechanisms. We recognize the usefulness of monitoring and of the inclusion of a list of parties in conflict that are violating these standards in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports. Recent successful cases of the release of children associated with armed conflicts through United Nations facilitation is proof of how effective these measures can be.

We underscore the importance of penalizing this crime in national legislation, as well as prosecuting perpetrators in national tribunals or, if those tribunals are unable or unwilling to do that, at the International Criminal Court, as a preventative measure and in order to combat impunity. Similarly, we consider it necessary to strengthen actions to ensure effective protection of places such as schools, hospitals and recreation centres for children and adolescents in order to prevent acts of violence that not only take innocent victims but also diminish the possibilities of providing safe places for children and their development in conflict and post-conflict situations.

We must not forget that violence and abductions have devastating psychological effects on children and that in order to correct that impact and care for those children and their families we need greater psychological, medical and legal assistance, and that involves considerable cost for the countries involved in conflict.

The extreme violence that we saw in 2014 committed by the actors referred to in the Secretary-General's report will have a serious and lasting impact on the children who have been their victims. Therefore we, the international community, will face additional long-term challenges in providing comprehensive reintegration programmes. Those challenges pose a potential additional risk for the resurgence of violent acts in some regions where the situation is not improving.

We welcome the adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) today, in which the Secretary-General is requested to include cases involving the abduction of children in the annexes to his reports on children and armed conflict. We recognize that cases such as that

of Dominic Ongwen of the Lord's Resistance Army show how contemptible such crimes against children in armed conflict are. They are clear proof of how violence in conflicts feeds upon itself and is repeated when children are not protected. We therefore urge the international community to take relevant measures to halt the growing trend of child abductions and to establish and strengthen the necessary mechanisms to keep such crimes from happening.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Luxembourg.

Ms. Lucas (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): Please allow me to congratulate Malaysia on having organized this public debate. Resolution 2225 (2015), just adopted today by the Security Council, is a key contribution to strengthening the agenda on children and armed conflicts, which, as is well known, is of particular importance to Luxembourg. I should also like to thank the Secretary-General, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and the representative of UNICEF, for their statements and briefings. We have also listened with great attention to the testimony of Ms. Eunice Apio, who shared her experience on the ground based on her work with Ugandan child victims of the Lord's Resistance Army.

Luxembourg also fully aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union.

The annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409) reflects the unprecedented challenges encountered in 2014 — recruitment, murders, sexual violence and abductions — the daily fate of tens of thousands of children during conflicts. We all remember the military offensive last year in the Gaza Strip, which cost the lives of 557 Palestinian children trapped by the hostilities, as well as 4 Israeli children. Those violations are abundantly documented in the current annual report. We condemn in the strongest terms all violations committed against all children. A child affected by conflict is a victim, no matter the nationality. Also, the perpetrators of those violations, no matter who they are, must be held responsible for their actions.

Education is also threatened more and more in armed conflicts, whether during attacks against schools or in the context of their use for military purposes. In either case the lives of children are directly threatened. Such actions deprive future generations of education, with the harmful consequences that that causes for the country's recovery. In Syria almost 900 schools were partially or entirely destroyed by the end of 2014. Last year, 60 attacks against schools were documented, and two thirds of those attacks were perpetrated by Syrian governmental forces. The regime does not hesitate to bomb its own population in public areas, including using barrel bombs, which indiscriminately sow death in their wake, as in the recent attacks committed in the province of Aleppo. In the regions occupied by Daesh, schools, meant to be places of intellectual emancipation, are transformed into places for indoctrination or simply closed.

We call on all States to take specific measures to dissuade parties in conflict from using schools for military purposes, in accordance with resolution 2143 (2014) and today's resolution 2225 (2015). Last month in Oslo, Luxembourg, together with 36 other countries, endorsed the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict by endorsing the Safe Schools Declaration. We hope that other Member States will also be able to endorse those guidelines.

We welcome the progress achieved through the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, aimed at preventing the recruitment and use of children by national security forces in times of conflict. We encourage all actors concerned to redouble their efforts to ensure the success of that initiative. At the same time, it is urgent to develop specific strategies to deal with the issue of non-State armed groups, which make up the great majority of the parties listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's annual report on the subject. The scale of abuses committed by extremist groups such as Daesh and Boko Haram demands a determined response from the international community.

In that context, we welcome the fact that resolution 2225 (2015) adds child abductions as a new trigger for the inclusion of parties responsible for such crimes in the annexes to the annual report. That is a key contribution to the existing normative framework and will draw attention to a violation that has at times been wrongly considered simply a consequence of child recruitment or sexual violence. The addition of that new trigger should encourage us to mobilize even more in support of the signing and implementation of new plans of action so as to end all violations against children.

I should like to stress the importance that my delegation places on programmes for disarmament,

demobilization and reintegration. For children scarred by war, reintegration must be the beginning of a new chapter in their lives. It is crucial that post-conflict plans, programmes and strategies for rebuilding and reconstruction prioritize issues dealing with children affected by the conflict. That also requires the availability of the necessary resources.

There should be no impunity for those who commit the worst atrocities against children. They must know that they will be held accountable, including before the International Criminal Court. Our sense of justice is at stake. The protection of children is at stake.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Netherlands.

Ms. Samson (Netherlands): I should 'ike to thank Malaysia, as President of the Council for this month, for organizing today's open debate. I should also like to thank today's briefers, in particular Special Representative Ms. Zerrougui, whom we wish to reassure of our continued strong support.

The Netherlands aligns itself with the statement of the European Union.

Each year thousands of children are abducted in armed conflicts, taken from their secure home environment, leaving behind destroyed families and destabilized communities. Their future is often filled with horrific crimes such as systematic violence, rape, indoctrination, forced conversion and forced recruitment as child soldiers. We need to step up our efforts to protect children, especially when they are the most vulnerable, that is, in armed conflict situations. Because of the abhorrent consequences of abduction, such as child recruitment and sexual exploitation, abductions should trigger increased attention from the international community.

In this intervention I should like to focus on the link between the indoctrination and the recruitment of child soldiers and will touch upon prevention, monitoring and reporting and accountability.

States are primarily responsible for protecting their populations from atrocity crimes. Special focus should be placed on protecting the most vulnerable groups, such as children. The Netherlands remains strongly committed to the principle of the responsibility to protect. We believe that prevention is at the core of the responsibility to protect. We have a growing tool-box of prevention instruments to work with, allowing for tailor-made approaches. We have a responsibility to take the necessary measures to safeguard children, especially in areas where rebel groups are active.

When prevention fails, as it has in several cases mentioned in the annex to the Secretary-General's report on children in armed conflict (S/2015/409), the monitoring and reporting of abductions are crucial. The reference to such cases in the report of the Secretary-General provides a strong political signal. It forms the basis for condemning abductions and clearly shows the international community where to focus its efforts. We therefore reiterate our full support for designating abductions as a fifth criterion for listing in the annex to the Secretary-General's annual report.

We need to ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law in general and for violations that affect civilian populations and children in particular. Whereas the International Criminal Court (ICC) can play an important role, the primary responsibility to hold perpetrators accountable lies with States. Therefore, national capacity has to be strengthened where needed. We need to be aware of the fact that often perpetrators were once victims of abduction themselves. Tragically, in many cases abductees are recruited and become perpetrators themselves when they are forced to commit atrocities against their own families and friends. It is therefore crucial to consider alternative non-judicial measures and a comprehensive package of psycho-social support for children who escape from rebel groups.

The Ongwen case at the International Criminal Court is an extreme example of an abductee who turned into a perpetrator. After being abducted at age 10, he rose through the ranks of the Lord's Resistance Army and became one of the top commanders and has now been indicted by the ICC for atrocious crimes. The dilemma of victims becoming perpetrators raises important questions about how to ensure accountability. More importantly, it confirms the importance of preventing abduction and child recruitment, as that can reinforce conflicts.

As long as the root causes of conflicts are not addressed, children remain vulnerable to abduction and recruitment. We believe that children are often deliberately used as weapons in conflicts. Children are specifically targeted by extremist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Boko Haram, indoctrinated with extremist ideology and then

deployed as fighters. We should address those new threats and risks in an overall child-protection strategy and interrupt the cycle of abduction, indoctrination and recruitment of children.

In conclusion, I should like to underline and reiterate our support for the Safe Schools Declaration and the underlying guidelines, which usefully complement existing international law and include incentives for all actors involved in armed conflict to respect student safety and the right to education. In addition, let me reiterate our strong support for the United Nations "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. Momentum is building, and the goal of the campaign is within reach. Such initiatives directly contribute to a better situation for children in conflict and deserve strong support from all of us.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Plasai (Thailand) (*spoke in French*): Let me join others in congratulating Malaysia on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. Let me also express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his latest report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409), the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and the representatives of UNICEF and other civil groups for their insightful briefings.

We welcome the holding of this debate on children and armed conflict for the second time this year, which reflects the continuing importance that the Council and United Nations States Members attach to this issue. It is also an opportunity to reflect on how best the international community can lessen the impact of armed conflict on future generations.

We align ourselves with the statement that will be made on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) by the representative of Viet Nam.

At this important juncture, the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, let me express our confidence that, under Malaysia's able chairmanship, the Working Group will positively contribute to the ongoing international efforts to end impunity and ensure accountability, and thus create an environment in which children are far removed from armed conflicts.

New challenges have emerged since 2005. As evidence shows, non-State actors have become more involved in grave abuses and violence against children in situations of armed conflict. Hence, the success or failure of child-protection efforts today depends primarily on how the issue of non-State actors is addressed. We believe that, owing to the unique context of each conflict, it is necessary for the key child-protection stakeholders in the United Nations system to work in close consultation with the Governments concerned in cases involving non-State actors, and that in accordance with their respective mandates.

Another issue of concern to us is the abduction of children. We have therefore closely followed the current discussion in the Working Group regarding the recommendation in the Secretary-General's report to expand the tools available to gather information and report on this issue, which in our view needs careful consideration by all concerned. As a matter of principle, protecting children from all forms of violence must be a priority when considering the mandates of peacekeeping operations.

Let me also commend the success of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign in preventing the recruitment of child soldiers and enhancing public awareness that children have no place in an armed conflict. The success of the campaign should be replicated so as to deter other grave violations of children's rights. At the same time, efforts must be made by the international community to reduce the impact of armed conflict on children, with a long-term strategy to lessen past traumas for the victims and to secure long-term resources for their successful reintegration and rehabilitation.

The Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict is useful in assisting Member States in determining how to direct limited resources to protect children where they are needed most. We encourage closer consultation and engagement between Member States and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict so as to ensure that, to the fullest extent possible, the report is based on objective, accurate, reliable and verifiable information. That commitment is critical to the protection of children in various situations and must not be underestimated. In that regard, we endeavour to seek better ways of establishing engagement and dialogue, based on the best interests of our children, in support of that mandate.

For our part, we have consistently remained engaged with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict regarding the report. We find that dialogue to be extremely necessary. Indeed, events taking place in our Kingdom that are mentioned in the report are duly addressed by the Royal Thai Government, which, with its sovereign responsibility, has been taking action to maintain law and order in accordance with Thai law and the Kingdom's international obligations. We nevertheless stand ready to develop further dialogue with the Office in the future in that regard.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating the Kingdom of Thailand's commitment to combating violations of children's rights, anywhere and by any parties. Suffering by children is not acceptable. That must end immediately, and those responsible must be brought to justice.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to wish you, Mr. President, a blessed Ramadan. Allow me to congratulate my dear friend His Excellency Dato Sri Anifah Aman, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and his friendly country, Malaysia, on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month and for holding this important meeting.

I would like to start with two pieces of news before I read out my statement. The first is that Daesh herds of Israeli settlers attacked and set fire to the Church of Loaves and Fishes on Lake Tiberias, in Upper Galilee, Palestine. That church was so named because Jesus Christ multiplied the fishes there. Today, the Daesh herds of Israeli settlers have burned it down and on its walls wrote malicious graffiti offensive to humankind and to religions. The second piece of news is directly related to the topic under discussion. According to the Turkish newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, the Turkish regime has backed down from transporting 1 million detonators to terrorist groups in Syria via Jordan. I wanted to bring those two pieces of news to the Council's attention.

At the time when the Government of Syria is receiving the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, in Damascus, in keeping with its serious commitment to eliminating terrorism and to finding a Syrian political solution to the crisis in Syria, the terrorist armed groups, which some would like to call "moderate", have pounded the cities of Aleppo and Damascus and the rural areas with all kinds of missiles, shells and mortars, and have set off booby-trapped cars over the past two days. Those groups have spared no residential area, school or hospital from their acts. That has resulted in the death and injury of hundreds of civilians, the majority of whom are women and children.

That was the subject of two letters that I sent to the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General on 16 June, hoping that the information contained in those letters would be taken seriously by the leaders of this international Organization and not be omitted from their future reports. We have had to deal with this problem in the past, and we are still facing the same problem in the report of the Secretary-General under discussion today (S/2015/409).

Just yesterday 7,000 mortar shells and rockets fell on the city of Aleppo. That figure could be useful to the representative of Luxembourg, who just had the floor. I would like to enlighten her cultural understanding and knowledge of the situation in Syria.

We are discussing the third report on children and armed conflict issued by the Secretary-General based on the recommendations of his Special Representative Ms. Zerrougui. These reports should have taken into consideration the information received from all the parties concerned — particularly all Governments, including the Syrian Government — with regard to the situation of the children in our country. Regretably, however, what we have witnessed over the past years, despite our close cooperation with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and her Office, is a dubious disregard by that Office of much correspondence and documented governmental evidence refuting the allegations included in this report and the preceding reports.

We have sent to the Office of the Special Representative a list of the names of the children killed by the terrorists and a list of the schools and hospitals that they targeted. We have sent her all the information that is relevant to her mandate and have provided her with hundreds, even thousands, of documents on actions committed by the terrorist armed groups against the children in Syria since the onset of the crisis. The latest of this correspondence was dated 30 March, and in it we provided Syria's detailed reply with regard to the allegations against the Government in Syria. That

reply and the evidence we provided were not taken into consideration in this report. Not one of those actions we detailed were mentioned in the report. That is a source of concern for us and tarnishes the image of those who drafted the report.

That leads us to one conclusion: the people who wrote these reports have become a tool in the hands of some influential countries in this international Organization with a view to tarnishing the image of the Syrian Government. The drafters of these reports will not accept any view that has not been endorsed by those influential countries. That accounts for the lack of any recommendation to add the Israeli armed forces to the lists in the annex of the report as the party responsible for the killing of thousands of Palestinians under occupation over the last six months. It also accounts for the failure by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General over the last years to even mention the suffering of the Syrian children in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Despite what has been said, I think the general line of thinking behind this report is to ignore facts and only mention the numbers of the victims. It fails to mention the real causes behind the crisis and denies the role played by sponsor countries, especially their role in increasing the grave violations of the rights of our children, especially the recruitment of children by terrorist and extremist groups.

Despite all those acts, our country has assumed its responsibility and provided protection for its citizens. I think we have to refute all the allegations against the Syrian Government, which is actually fighting terrorism, instead of accusing the countries that sponsor terrorism in the country.

In Syria and the neighbouring refugee camps, the heinous ways used to recruit children are unprecedented. They have targeted 4-year-old children. I do not believe that we have just been imagining the propaganda videos released by Daesh depicting children, some under 10 years old, collectively executing dozens of detainees held by that terrorist organization, either by shooting or beheading them.

How have children come to commit these murderous massacres? Regrettably, terrorist groups have indoctrinated our children by teaching them their murderous ideologies, after abducting them from their loved ones and instructing them on how to commit such crimes, on the basis of takfiri and Wahhabi teachings.

We have witnessed the horrendous and appalling massacre committed by Al-Nusra Front terrorist operatives against 40 Syrian civilians in the village of Qalb Al-Loza in rural Idlib last week. More than half of the victims were children. The massacre was carried out because the villagers had refused to recruit their children into the Al-Nusra terrorist group. In this connection, our country supports adding the crime of the abduction of children as a form of grave violation, identifying those responsible for such crimes and listing them in the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General. We must recall here that the crimes committed by Daesh and the Al-Nusra Group have their roots in the Middle Ages, with the Seljuks, the Ottomans and the Janissary army.

Despite all of that, the Syrian Government is making every effort to protect its children from this terrorist extremist ideology. We have been successful in reopening 207 schools in the area of rural Hasakah, but more than 532 schools are still closed because they are controlled by Daesh operatives. These schools are used to stockpile weapons. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General is accusing the Syrian Government of targeting schools without really explaining the situation or indicating who is using them for terrorist purposes. The Syrian Government has spared no effort in fostering cooperation with the Special Representative's monitoring and reporting team; we have provided her Office with fully documented information on the hundreds of crimes and grave violations committed by these groups, in the hope that these acts will be immediately investigated.

Some say that two thirds of the schools that were destroyed were destroyed by the Syrian Government, as if they had counted these schools one by one and thus reached this conclusion. As I mentioned earlier, the Syrian Government has spared no effort in cooperating with the Special Representative in the area of monitoring and reporting. However, we have not seen any effective or concrete actions to that end.

What is required today is to put an end to the policies adopted by terrorism-sponsoring Goverments; some of these countries are members of the Council. It is also important to take measures to hold these Governments accountable and to implement the Security Council resolutions on combating terrorism, especially resolution 2199 (2015). It is also important to provide support for the Syrian Government, with a view to rehabilitating and reintegrating children into

their communities. Otherwise, ammunition and fuel for this war will continue to flow into the country from outside Syria. New generations within and outside Syria will be raised against the backdrop of bloodshed and violence, which will only further the agendas of terrorist organizations and their backers and prolong the crisis, which may spread worldwide.

The President: Once again, I wish to remind all speakers to keep their statements concise, as we are only halfway through our speakers' list.

I now give the floor to the representative of Poland.

Mr. Winid (Poland): Poland aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. I should like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

First, I would like to thank the Malaysian presidency for organizing this timely and important debate, and I welcome the adoption of the resolution on the abduction of children (resolution 2225 (2015)), which Poland co-sponsored. I also thank today's briefers, in particular Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, for her moving update.

Children are the ones that suffer most in the course of and following armed conflicts. Growing up in a hostile environment has an immense impact on a child's health, physical integrity, education and social abilities.

Although there are no exact figures and the numbers are constantly changing, tens of thousands of children continue to serve in Government forces or armed opposition groups. It is high time to intensify our efforts to suppress this dreadful trend. As the main initiator of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted almost 26 years ago, Poland is doing its utmost to raise awareness about children's rights and ensure that they are respected in their own countries and internationally.

In this regard, recently the Polish Government has provided assistance to a number of Syrian families suffering from the horror of conflict. As a sign of solidarity with those persecuted, we have committed to helping Syrian children resume normal lives in Poland. I wish to seize this opportunity to extend my warm thanks to the Governments of Jordan and Lebanon for their support in the evacuation of Syrian refugees on route from the conflict area to Poland.

Bearing in mind the provisions contained in the preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the desire expressed therein for children to grow up

> "in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding",

we are of the opinion that the international community should undertake all possible steps to eradicate the root causes and consequences of the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Comprehensive action plans should be elaborated to help children recuperate and more effectively adjust to living conditions during hostilities and in the post-war period. In this context, ensuring universal access to education must be a priority. Poland is therefore proud to have been one of the first countries to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, signed in Oslo, which aims to prevent the military use of schools during armed conflict.

I would like to thank in particular Ms. Zama Coursen-Neff, director of the Children's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch, who is actively promoting the concept of safe schools. I also thank Ambassador Geir Pedersen of Norway and Ambassador María Cristina Perceval of Argentina for their Governments' leadership and engagement in promoting this crucial initiative.

We are concerned that in South Sudan, Syria, the Congo and Mali, children are being abducted or recruited as soldiers, thus becoming active participants in armed conflicts. Their recruitment is carried out in a violent and cruel way. Some of them enter military service voluntarily, just to escape poverty or protect their families. In that context, let me recall that resolution 2143 (2014) underscores the importance of mainstreaming child-protection issues when undertaking security-sector reform, including age-assessment mechanisms to prevent underage recruitment and the establishment of child-protection units in national security forces.

Last but not least, it is of the utmost importance, in our opinion, that all countries sign, ratify and effectively implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Along those lines, violators of those provisions should ultimately face international accountability mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Estonia.

Ms. Lind (Estonia): First, I want to warmly thank today's briefers and, in particular, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Leila Zerrougui, for her briefing and her tireless efforts. We also thank the Malaysian presidency for organizing this important debate.

Estonia aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2015/409), which provides a solid — although deeply concerning — basis for today's debate.

It is extremely worrying that violence rose to unprecedented levels in 2014, leading to a dramatic increase in grave violations against children. Last year was full of challenges for the protection of tens of millions of children growing up in, among other countries, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria and, most recently, in Yemen, where the security situation has deteriorated.

We strongly support the initiative of Malaysia to introduce the abduction of children as an additional criterion in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict. The abduction of children is unfortunately indeed a prevalent feature of contemporary armed conflict. It is used as a tactic of war to terrorize, suppress and humiliate communities. According to the Secretary-General's report, in Iraq and Syria alone, more than 1,000 girls and boys were abducted by the Islamic State in the Levant in 2014. In that regard, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) in the Council today, which adds abduction as a trigger for listing. As a next step, we need to ensure that child-protection provisions are incorporated in the most efficient way into peace processes, negotiations and ceasefires.

A considerable number of violations against children are carried out by non-State armed groups, which was one of the focuses of our previous debate on the subject (see S/PV.7414). We commend the work of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui in addressing the challenging task of engaging with armed groups, and the case-by-case approach aimed at ending the recruitment and use of children. However, more needs to be done by all those concerned.

I would also like to draw attention to the situation in Ukraine, as 1.7 million children there are affected by the conflict. Over 68 children had been killed and 176 wounded in eastern Ukraine as of the end of March 2014, and the actual numbers are probably higher. We would ask the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to look into those grave violations against children in Ukraine.

We see impunity as clearly one of the main reasons for the recurrence of those grave violations against children. It is only by consistent prosecution that we can deter the commission of such crimes. In order to achieve that, we reiterate the important role of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in situations where States are unable or unwilling to bring perpetrators to justice domestically. In order to make good on its commitment to deal effectively with persistent perpetrators, the Council could increase pressure on them by including violations against children in the mandate of all sanctions committees and by including individuals sought by the ICC on sanctions lists. In the context of today's discussion, we also welcome the Court's efforts in preparing a policy paper on the protection of children. However, when talking about accountability, we should not close our eyes to actions committed by the United Nations system personnel. All violations by United Nations staff and United Nations peacekeeping troops need to be addressed.

Finally, allow me to mention Estonia's contribution to the advancement of the children and armed conflict agenda. We recently supported UNICEF's work in South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Gaza, Syria and Somalia. I am glad to announce that Estonia will support the Office of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict this year with a contribution of €30,000. Children deserve a safe and happy environment to grow up in. If the Organization — and by that I mean us, its Members — can do something to ensure that goal, we should not hesitate to seize every opportunity to do so. I hope that today's debate represents a tangible step forward in that regard.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium.

Ms. Frankinet (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I thank you, Madam President, for allowing my delegation to speak in this debate.

Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and would like to make the following statement in its national capacity.

My country welcomes the annual report of the Secretary-General on today's topic (S/2015/409) and deplores the fact that armed conflict continues to affect children disproportionately. In fact, the annual report notes that we faced unprecedented challenges in 2014 in attempting to ensure the protection of tens of millions of children growing up in countries affected by conflict. One phenomenon that is becoming increasingly common, according to the report, is that of the mass abduction of civilians — including children. The information contained in the report shows that, given the increased frequency and number of abductions, children need to be better protected. Belgium supports the request of the Secretary-General to the Council to increase the types of tools available, which include those used by child-protection agencies to collect and share information on child abductions. In that regard, Belgium believes that it would be useful to add the abduction of children as a trigger violation in compiling the lists annexed to the annual report. For that reason, my country decided to sponsor resolution 2225 (2015), adopted by the Council today.

The report also shows that children continue to be victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence. The impunity that the perpetrators of sexual violence enjoy remains a subject of deep concern. A climate of impunity, characterized by a lack of disciplinary procedures, sanctions and criminal prosecutions, contributes to creating an environment filled with risks for children. Belgium wishes to underline the importance of ensuring effective access to justice for victims of sexual violence.

In conclusion, we would like to stress that the indiscriminate use of weapons — including barrel bombs — is prohibited under international humanitarian law. We are shocked by the indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas in Syria, which continue to kill and maim thousands of people — many of whom are children. In that context, Belgium would also like to reiterate its concern over the use of explosive weapons — particularly in densely populated regions — and calls on all parties to armed conflict to renounce their use. My country also calls on those States that have yet to ratify the relevant international instruments, to do so as soon as possible, particularly the conventions banning anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany.

Mr. Schieb (Germany): I thank you, Madam President, for hosting today's debate. I also thank all the participants who have provided us with insightful briefings. Germany also extends its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his annual report (S/2015/409).

Germany aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

We consider it to be of great value that the Council continues to pay close attention to the children and armed conflict agenda. Parties to conflicts that hurt children for the sake of strategic advantage are guilty of some of the worst crimes imaginable. The perpetrators show an abominable degree of treachery and cowardice. They destroy not only the lives of children but the very foundation of societies. Germany therefore strongly believes that it is the Security Council's responsibility to firmly oppose such practices wherever they occur. We need to shed light on those who use and abuse children in the most horrible ways. We must hold them accountable and, even more importantly, we must redouble our efforts to prevent such crimes from being committed. Germany therefore welcomes the Council's decision to list abductions as a trigger for inclusion in the annex to the Secretary-General's annual report (see S/2015/409). As a strong supporter of the children and armed conflict portfolio, Germany was pleased to co-sponsor resolution 2225 (2015), adopted today.

Allow me to make three points. First, the Secretary-General's report notes that the number of abductions is increasing. That is a matter of great concern, all the more so because abductions are a precursor to other grave violations. The heinous abuse of children at the hands of such terrorist groups as Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), for example, shows this fact clearly. We hope that the additional trigger and the mechanism associated with it will be effective in preventing future abductions. We would find it particularly helpful if the next report of the Secretary-General indicated where abductions are occurring beyond the well-known cases in Nigeria, Iraq and Syria, and away from the media spotlight.

Secondly, we reiterate our call to use the existing sanctions regimes more effectively to increase accountability for grave violations against children. The sanctions committees must define designation criteria relating to children and armed conflict and encourage the Special Representative to share information with them. The Security Council must not shy away from

using the information collected through the monitoring and reporting process.

Thirdly, I would like to point out that those entrusted with the protection of children must never become perpetrators themselves. We condemn all cases of sexual abuse in the context of peacekeeping missions led or mandated by the United Nations. We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's zero tolerance approach. We call on all troop contributors and the Secretariat to hold all perpetrators accountable. We call for stronger internal oversight in the Secretariat and in its justice mechanisms, and for the protection of whistle-blowers. We look forward to the results of the independent external review initiated by the Secretary-General with regard to reported abuse.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to begin by thanking the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, His Excellency Mr. Dato Sri Anifah Aman, for his presence, and to take this opportunity to congratulate the Ambassador of Malaysia, His Excellency Mr. Ramlan Bin Ibrahim, for his commitment and tireless efforts as Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children in Armed Conflict. I would also like to thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, for her courage and dedication to the thorough implementation of her mandate and the high quality of her report. I would also like to thank the representative of UNICEF for her briefing.

A year after the launch of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign and 10 years after the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), much progress has been made. Children continue, however, to be the first victims of conflicts. The year 2014 saw an alarming intensification and a dangerous recurrence of conflicts, which are becoming increasingly complex, with unprecedented forms of violence, destructive effects and the involvement of violent extremist groups, all of which has made clear the great vulnerability of tens of millions of children.

The mass abduction of children by Daesh and Boko Haram has become an increasingly widespread characteristic of conflict situations. The whole world, powerless, frustrated and outraged, is witnessing a wave of child abductions being systematically used as a military tactic to terrorize, subjugate and humiliate entire communities. Children are also being abducted for the purposes of recruitment and exploitation for all sorts of tasks, including their use as human shields or as suicide bombers. Many are used as combatants, messengers, sex slaves, spies or traffickers, or even as beasts of burden to transport ammunition. Snatched from normal life, school and the bosom of their families, they are carried off by armed groups and thrust into a world of violence and horror. Their abduction is often a precursor to other grave violations against them, such as murder, mutilation, recruitment, exploitation and sexual violence.

Another source of concern is their detention and the denial of their basic liberty in response to their presumed association with extremist groups. Children should be treated as victims. The prohibition of violence, in particular murder, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture, against civilians, in particular children, is a principle of international customary law, universally applicable to all armed conflicts. The illegal and arbitrary detention of children is prohibited under international humanitarian and human rights law.

No cause can justify the abduction of children. They have the right to be protected at school, at home, in their environment and in their community. Those abducted by State or non-State armed groups and subsequently released have lived through terrible scenes and psychologically traumatic experiences during their captivity. How can such children be expected to get over their suffering, their traumas, and be able to rebuild their life or start it anew? They need our support as a matter of priority. As Ms. Zerrougui emphasized this morning in her statement, the continuation of and increase in child recruitment in armed conflict, in particular by jihadi armed groups including the Islamic State, and the abduction of hundreds of girls by the terrorist group Boko Haram, demand our attention and the coordination of the efforts of the international community.

Morocco condemns in the strongest possible terms all forms of violence against children, their abduction by State or non-State armed groups, their use as shields near arms depots or military camps, their being taken as hostages or their recruitment at refugee camps. Morocco also condemns attacks on schools or hospitals and the use of such facilities for tactical purposes.

It is the international community's duty to take strong emergency measures to hold accountable all

those who continue to flout international law and the rules for the protection of children, wherever they are. The coordination of such efforts among the various stakeholders in the United Nations system is a guarantee of effectiveness and success, but the primary responsibility falls above all on the parties to conflict, who must comply with their international obligations in accordance with the resolutions of the Security Council and the relevant international conventions.

Although today's debate has the merit of remobilizing all the stakeholders in the international community, it must, unfortunately, be acknowledged that the efforts made so far to end violence against children and their involvement or use in armed conflicts are insufficient. My delegation believes that the international community's efforts would benefit from being part of a composite, strategic approach that not only addresses ongoing conflict situations but also emphasizes prevention through the establishment of democracy and the upholding of human rights, the enhancement of good governance and the promotion of sustainable development. At the same time, the approach must be pragmatic, combining incentives with more binding measures, in particular with regard to accountability and the struggle against impunity.

Lastly, the resettlement of children who have been victims of terror and scenes of horror during their abduction, and their reintegration into society, must be given a high priority. There is no single solution, but various methods are effective in reducing, for example, the number of child soldiers in non-State armed groups, including the strengthening of the rule of law, the mobilization of resources for rehabilitation programmes and the analysis of the social, political and economic dynamics that result in children allowing themselves to be enlisted. It is time that crimes committed against children in armed conflict be considered crimes against humanity, for children are the future of their nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Canada.

Mr. Rishchynski (Canada) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Malaysian presidency for enabling us to participate in this debate on children and armed conflict.

(*spoke in English*)

In the past year we have seen horrific situations in armed conflict in which children have been primary targets, particularly for violent extremists, with abductions, recruitment and the use of child soldiers in active hostilities and the violent radicalization of youth, as well as sexual exploitation and abuse which, as we note with great concern and dismay, has sometimes been perpetrated by personnel attached to peace support operations.

The international community was horrified by Boko Haram's abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Nigeria in the spring of last year. Less well known but also deplorable were the abductions by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria of 153 Kurdish boys in Syria and hundreds of Yazidi children in western Iraq, as well as the case of 89 schoolboys kidnapped in South Sudan. While mass abductions draw the media limelight, hundreds of children have been abducted by such groups both before and since those events. Canada strongly condemns the abductions and calls for the immediate release of all abducted children without delay. The international community must work to ensure that the children receive the support they require and are reunited with their families immediately.

(*spoke in French*)

Sadly, abductions are often simply the precursors to other grave violations such as forced recruitment, forced conversion and sexual violence. They have especially horrible consequences for girls, who are exposed to sexual violence, slavery and forced marriage, as well as forced recruitment. Furthermore, they face difficulties once they are released, since they are often the victims of social stigmatization that hinders their reintegration into their communities.

We are horrified that armed groups are abducting children from schools. When parents fear that their children might be abducted, they are less likely to send them to school, and the repercussions of that decision are particularly hard on girls. This is very worrying, given the fact that education is a very powerful tool for ensuring the achievement of many development goals, including improved maternal, newborn and child health and the eradication of child, early and forced marriage.

(*spoke in English*)

Canada condemns the unlawful use of schools by armed parties for military purposes. We call on all parties to armed conflict to respect international humanitarian law and refrain from using schools as bases, barracks, weapons caches or detention centres.

We urge Member States to undertake preventive measures to guard against children's abductions. We must hold those who commit abductions to account, and ensure safe conditions for children who are released. We therefore welcome the adoption today of resolution 2225 (2015), on abductions, of which Canada was honoured to be a sponsor.

Ten years ago, the international community established the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, designed to systematically monitor, document and report on such violations. Canada is proud to have supported that initiative, and while the problem is far from solved, we have seen some small glimmers of hope. This year saw the delisting of Chad, a decline of violations in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and the release of hundreds of child soldiers.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada was deeply saddened to learn that many children, both Israeli and Palestinian, were injured and killed during the conflict that erupted in Gaza in the summer of 2014, for which Hamas is solely responsible. As the Secretary-General notes in his report (S/2015/409), the indiscriminate firing of rockets by Palestinian armed groups from populated areas endangered civilian populations in both Israel and Gaza and led to deaths and injuries among children.

Canada is disappointed, however, that in his report, rather than calling on all parties to take steps to protect children affected by armed conflict, the Secretary-General demonstrates an overt bias in singling out Israel for one-sided and disproportionate criticism. The fact that 32 paragraphs in the report are devoted to Israel — giving it far more attention than any other Member State, including Syria, the Central African Republic and the Sudan — speaks to the need to provide a more honest, impartial and balanced view of the situation on the ground than the one in this document. This biased view undermines the integrity of such an important document. Moreover, the United Nations should better address the significant underreporting of the deaths of children in situations such as in Syria, so that Member States can have an accurate view of the effects on children of that deadly conflict.

(*spoke in English*)

Any sexual abuse or exploitation is simply unacceptable. With regard to today's debate, however, we would like to shine a spotlight on the heinous practice of targeting children. Canada condemns in the strongest terms all forms of sexual abuse or exploitation of children by any party to a conflict. Our country is committed to ensuring that the rights of children are protected in all settings, particularly in situations of armed conflict. I would like to assure the Council that we will continue to work with all members of the international community to ensure that all children, all over the world, have safe spaces in which to grow and learn. That is our duty and our responsibility.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Austria.

Mr. Riecken (Austria): Austria fully aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union.

In my national capacity, I would like to thank the Malaysian presidency of the Council for convening today's open debate. Austria welcomes the discussion's particular focus and condemns the extremely worrying rise in abductions of children by parties to armed conflict, in contravention of the applicable international law.

We appreciate the Secretary-General's submission of his most recent annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409), including the list of perpetrators in its annexes. We support his call to the Council to add abductions as a fifth trigger violation for listing in the annexes, and therefore welcome today's adoption of a resolution (resolution 2225 (2015)) that adds abduction as a trigger. We also welcome the hard and committed work of Special Representative Zerrougui, as well as that of UNICEF, the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Political Affairs and the Resident Coordinators as co-Chairs of the country task forces, along with that of the task force members and recognized partners in the field. Together with the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, chaired by Malaysia, they implement the Security Council's well-established framework for protecting children in armed conflict.

The signing of action plans, especially with non-State armed actors, which make up the vast majority of listed parties, must be facilitated and efforts must made to implement them. The Governments concerned should play a supportive role in that process and allow the United Nations access to the relevant areas. Furthermore, provisions on child protection should be included in peace talks and agreements. Austria stresses

the importance of fighting impunity and ensuring accountability under national and international jurisdictions. And we should pay special attention to the victims of armed conflict, especially girls. Crimes must not go unpunished, and their effective prosecution must be ensured through regional justice mechanisms and the International Criminal Court if efforts at the national level do not produce the expected results.

Every child should have access to education, including in regions of armed conflict. Recent events have shown the timeliness of a focus on protecting schools against attacks and avoiding their use for military purposes. Austria actively supported the consultations on the Safe Schools Declaration, adopted at the Oslo Conference on Safe Schools at the end of May. We are pleased to see how many countries have already endorsed the Declaration and encourage all other Member States to do so. Furthermore, Austria urges all parties to armed conflicts to use the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

We strongly condemn the recruitment of children by armed forces. We support the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers and children affected by war and reiterate our commitment to the 2014 United Nations Children, Not Soldiers campaign. Monitoring and reporting on the detention of children for their association with armed forces or groups must continue. Austria actively supported the elaboration of the United Nations Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (General Assembly resolution 69/194, annex) and calls on Member States to use them.

We commend the Secretariat's efforts, including the expert seminars organized in the past two years by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in London and Oslo, to raise awareness about the devastating humanitarian consequences of explosive weapons for civilians, including children, and to restrict their use in populated areas where they cause indiscriminate harm. Austria itself will host an expert meeting in Vienna on 21 and 22 September 2015. We welcome the Secretary-General's recommendation to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas and the Secretariat's efforts to develop practical measures and guidance to reduce their humanitarian impact. In that regard, we welcome the Secretary-General's initiative to study national practices, and we encourage countries to support him in that regard.

Finally, we urge Member States who have not yet done so to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovenia.

Mr. Logar (Slovenia): I first wish to thank Malaysia for organizing this timely high-level debate and to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and other speakers for their briefings.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statement made earlier today on behalf of the European Union.

Slovenia shares the concerns expressed by many other delegations that 2014 was the worst year for the tens of millions of children affected by conflicts around the world and deplores all grave violations committed against them. Children should not be recruited as soldiers, used as suicide bombers, trafficked or sold for use in hostilities, forcibly married, raped or used as sex slaves. They should not serve as deliberate targets of killing or maiming, including as a consequence of unexploded remnants or landmines.

My delegation has been very concerned about the increased prevalence of mass abductions in 2014, particularly those by extremist groups. Abductions by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and by Daesh in Syria and Iraq and by Boko Haram in Nigeria and neighbouring States are just examples of the most striking cases. Abductions have long-term consequences, not only for the abducted children and their families, but for communities. Sometimes, as outlined in the Secretary-General's latest annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409), such acts also impact national and international peace and security.

In addition, abductions may trigger the recruitment, mobilization and indoctrination of children and can be seen as an early warning signs for mass atrocities. Those issues were discussed at the conference Rights for Peace: Challenges and Opportunities, organized by Slovenia earlier this year. Slovenia therefore welcomes the Security Council's decision in resolution 2225 (2015) to add abductions as a trigger for listing parties in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report.

We would also like to reiterate our concern regarding the increased number of attacks and the military use of schools in 2014, such as the attacks by the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan and by Boko Haram in Nigeria. In that regard, we would like to recall resolution 2134 (2014) and call on all parties to the conflict to respect the civilian character of schools in accordance of international humanitarian law.

On the other hand, we would like to take note with appreciation of the progress made in 2014 towards ending and preventing the recruitment and the use of children by armed forces and groups. We note with appreciation the progress this Council has made in including issues of children and armed conflict in country-specific resolutions, presidential statements, sanctions regimes and mandates of relevant peacekeeping and political missions, in the work of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, and in briefings to the Council by relevant United Nations stakeholders.

However, there is a gap in the implementation of the Council's decisions on the ground. In the 10 years since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), the normative framework on children and armed conflict has been set, and efforts to transform this framework into actions by the Council have been addressed. We now need to translate Council decisions into concrete actions on the ground. We agree with the Secretary-General's report on the need to address the lack of accountability and the issue of impunity that accompanies it, and we therefore welcome the inclusion of the call to fight impunity in resolution 2225 (2015), adopted today. Perpetrators of such violations must be held accountable in order to prove that crimes committed against children in conflict are inadmissible.

Ten years ago, the Security Council adopted that landmark resolution, 1612 (2005), which established the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Slovenia has always paid particular attention to the plight of children affected by armed conflict, especially their physical and psychosocial rehabilitation. In 2014 and 2015, we have supported projects focusing on the rehabilitation of children from Ukraine, Belarus and Palestine, implemented by the International Trust Fund Enhancing Human Security, which is based in Slovenia.

Finally, let me use this opportunity to encourage the Security Council to continue to address the issue of children and armed conflict and to seek the most effective means to improve their situation. The adoption of a new resolution today is an important step in that direction, and for that reason, Slovenia was proud to join other Member States in co-sponsoring it.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Oh Joon (Republic of Korea): I would like to congratulate Malaysia on its Council presidency for the month of June.

Since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) 10 years ago, the international community has continued to raise awareness regarding the protection of children in armed conflicts. Our efforts, however, have often been hampered by blindness and savagery. In 2014, we witnessed how countless children were sacrificed in conflicts for which they were not responsible. Our concern is that victimizing children is not only unacceptable in itself but sows the seeds for conflicts in future generations.

As the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, launched by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zerrougui and UNICEF, points out, children are not soldiers. No responsible member of the international community should use children for military purposes. Nor should the sacrifice of children be accepted as a mere unintended consequence of military actions. "An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind".

We support the Secretary-General, who stresses our common humanity and calls upon all Member States not to lose sight of the vital objective of protecting children, which is both a moral imperative and a legal obligation. We also support the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse. Accountability is the key to ending gross violations against children and preventing their recurrence. Monitoring and reporting, listing in the Secretary-General's report, targeted sanctions and enhanced justice mechanisms have proved to be effective in seeking accountability.

We welcome resolution 2225 (2015), adopted today, which includes abductions as a new trigger for listing in the Secretary-General's annual report. Enriching our toolkit for the protection of children is a signal that our shared vision is expanding, while pressuring all stakeholders to join us. It is encouraging that, this year, armed groups in the Central African Republic and South Sudan have released children under their control. Extremist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic

State in Iraq and the Levant, however, are likely to remain persistent. That is when a more fundamental and determined approach should be taken.

Lastly, we stress that children cannot be completely safe from devastating armed conflicts once they break out. Prevention is the best strategy. As a member of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Republic of Korea will continue to make efforts to prevent relapses into conflict. When prevention fails, a political solution should be swiftly sought. We should be especially vigilant with respect to situations in which the overwhelming sacrifice of children is overshadowed by the political and military context and perceived as an inevitable part of armed conflicts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Seger (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Like other delegations, Switzerland is deeply concerned by the scale of violence perpetrated against children.

First of all, the abduction of children is becoming a war practice used in systematic campaigns of intimidation and reprisals against civilian populations. Switzerland is particularly concerned by those developments, because they are often the precursor to many other serious violations committed against children, such as torture, sexual violence and enforced disappearances.

Switzerland therefore welcomes the decision of the Security Council to make the abduction of children a criterion for listing in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict, and that is why my country decided to co-sponsor the resolution.

Secondly, many non-State armed groups are attacking children's education, either by forcing children to stop attending classes and to join their ranks while exploiting them for propaganda purposes or by misusing educational facilities. Schools should be safe places where children can learn and should in no case be used as shields or shelters for combatants. In that regard, Switzerland welcomes the signing of the Safe Schools Declaration by 37 States that committed themselves to ensuring that schools would no longer be targeted in conflicts.

Thirdly, violations against children by non-State armed groups remain a major challenge, as others have already noted. Switzerland believes that it is urgent to find measures to strengthen compliance with international law by those actors. In that regard, we welcome the non-paper prepared by France for the March 2015 debate, which called for Member States to ensure that in their fight against terrorism and violent extremism they comply with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law and that they avoid criminalizing any contact initiated for exclusively humanitarian reasons with non-State armed groups considered extremist. We strongly urge the international community to support organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Geneva Call, which have direct access to such groups and which can make a difference through dialogue, awareness-raising and training aimed at implementing action plans and at ending violations against children.

Switzerland calls on States to view children primarily as victims and to draw up measures that will not adversely affect them, in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights. My country believes that we should avoid the detention of children suspected of having or determined to have links to armed groups considered violent extremists. In addition, the international community should give higher priority to youth awareness-raising programmes aimed at the prevention of all forms of extremism and to include a deradicalization component in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes.

Finally, Switzerland believes that the international community should send a clear signal that there will be no impunity for crimes committed against children. While States have the primary responsibility to take the necessary steps to bring the perpetrators of such acts to justice, the International Criminal Court, as others have noted, can play an important role when States are unable or unwilling to do so,

I cannot conclude my remarks without thanking Ms. Leila Zerrougui and her team, whose important work Switzerland thoroughly supports.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Argentina.

Mr. González Serafini (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank Malaysia for its initiative in organizing this debate and for the concept note (S/2015/402, annex) it distributed to guide today's discussion. I would also like to acknowledge the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia and to recognize the work of his country in its leadership of the Security Council Working Group on Children and

Armed Conflict. We also thank the Secretary-General for his statement and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, as well as the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and Ms. Eunice Apio, for their briefings.

A few days from now it will be 10 years since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which Argentina firmly supported as a member of the Council at that time. That resolution was particularly significant because it authorized the creation of an oversight and reporting mechanism to monitor, document and systematically report grave violations of children's human rights. It also created the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict with the aim of recognizing, guaranteeing and protecting the rights of children in situations of armed conflict.

In that framework, it bears repeating that Argentina decisively supports the work of the Council to prevent, avoid and halt grave violations of the rights of children in the context of armed conflicts. That commitment has been repeatedly demonstrated, as we were one of the first States to ratify the 2002 Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and to have actively promoted the adoption of resolutions 1261 (1999), 1612 (2005) and 2143 (2014). By the same token, we joined in co-sponsoring resolution 2225 (2015), which the Council adopted this morning.

Moreover, we highlight the progress achieved in the area of prevention and protection of the rights of children through the coordinated activities of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict and the efforts of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in collaboration with UNICEF and other United Nations organs. We firmly support the need to agree and implement measures to increase the pressure on both State and non-State actors who continue to commit violations. In that connection, we repeat that there is need for greater coordination between the system for the protection of children in armed conflicts and the different sanctions regimes so that sanctions can be imposed on the perpetrators of the most flagrant violations committed against children in conflict situations.

The protection of children from a human rights perspective must continue to be our priority. For that reason, it must be taken into account in defining the mandates of peacekeeping operations and special political missions, as well as in the Council's endeavours in the area of peacebuilding, by integrating more specialists into the different missions this body authorizes. It is also important for States in this Organization to ensure that training and preparation for the adequate protection of the rights of children in situations of armed conflict is not limited exclusively to personnel who are directly responsible for protecting children on the ground.

In fact, it is vital to incorporate in training programmes for military, police and civilian personnel comprising the missions of the United Nations a focus on human rights and full awareness of the rights of children and adolescents, as well as knowledge and understanding of strategies and processes for the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of children in situations of armed conflict. We also agree on the need to involve various stakeholders in order to advocate for an end to the involvement of children in armed forces and groups, including, among others, human rights activists, teachers, representatives of civil society, family members, health workers, religious leaders and other community actors.

Beyond the legal advances on the issue and the accomplishments of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, there is still much room for improvement. We must fight impunity in an unequivocal way for all those groups or individuals who commit these crimes. In that connection, this Council established two international tribunals — those for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. Today we have a system of international justice for the most serious crimes, including war crimes, no longer based on ad hoc tribunals but on a permanent court: the International Criminal Court established by the Rome Statute in 1998. In March 2012, the Court issued its first judgement, which found Thomas Lubanga Dyilo guilty of the war crime of recruiting children under 15 years to participate in hostilities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With that ruling, the Court made a significant contribution to the doctrine of protecting children in armed conflicts.

Argentina, like the international community, is fully aware of the devastating effects on children of armed conflicts as a result of their recruitment, their abduction, indiscriminate attacks against civilian areas or direct attacks against civilians by explosive weapons, air strikes, or the use of terror tactics that cause an unbearable number of casualties among children.

We recognize the outstanding work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, during the last year, particularly the United Nations Children, Not Soldiers campaign, to put an end to the recruitment and use of children by security forces of Governments in conflict situations before the end of 2016. We welcome those Governments that have already joined that campaign to ensure that in the near future we end the inconceivable practice of having child soldiers.

In closing, we also express our concern over and strongly condemn the increasing use of schools for military purposes and the increase in attacks against schools and hospitals. We believe this matter merits particular attention from the international community since it radically affects the right to education and the health of thousands of children worldwide. Therefore Argentina is committed to the process of the Lucens Guidelines to Protect Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

To that end, we wish to highlight in particular the adoption last May of the Oslo Declaration on Safe Schools, which was promoted by Norway and Argentina, among other countries. To date 39 countries have joined it. That Declaration commits States to implement the Lucens Guidelines to Protect Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, thereby ensuring the right to education and protection of children and young people in armed conflicts. We call on States Members of the United Nations, particularly members of the Council, to endorse the Declaration.

Finally, we stress once again the need to adopt an unequivocal focus that sees children as victims and not as perpetrators, because their alleged involvement in armed conflict has been forced through recruitment, kidnapping and other methods, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence and subjection to sexual slavery. In that regard, we wish to highlight and to welcome the adoption tomorrow by the General Assembly of a resolution establishing 19 June, the date of adoption of Security Council resolution 1820 (2008), as the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict. We believe that the establishment of such an international day will contribute in a significant way to raising the international community's awareness of the need to combat the crimes of sexual violence in conflict, and also to provide multisectoral and multidimensional assistance to victims and put an end to the impunity of the perpetrators of such crimes through an effective system of accountability before the relevant national and international legal systems.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Greece.

Mr. Pouleas (Greece): I would like to congratulate the Malaysian presidency for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict, a topic which has been high on the agenda of the Security Council. We would like to thank the Secretary-General, his Special Representative Ms. Leila Zerrougui and the other speakers for their thought-provoking briefings.

Greece aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union. We would like to add a few words in our national capacity.

At the outset, allow me to acknowledge the importance of the monitoring and reporting mechanism pertaining to mass and grave violations against children in armed conflict. The latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/409), which lays out gross violations committed against children in armed conflicts, is particularly important. Sadly, it includes some of the worst human rights violations a child could experience, including death, abduction and forced recruitment, which take place from Syria and Iraq to Nigeria and South Sudan.

Among the unprecedented challenges highlighted in the report, it is particularly alarming that in 2014 there was an upward trend in the abduction of children by armed groups. Abductions of children have been used as a tactic to terrorize ethnic groups or religious communities. In Iraq and Syria, over 1,000 girls and boys were abducted by the so-called Islamic State. In Nigeria, Boko Haram abducted hundreds of women and girls in Chibok. Abductions are often followed by other grave human rights violations, such as recruitment, rape or even killing.

It is crucial that abductions are included in the criteria for listing in the Secretary-General's report on children in armed conflict. Greece welcomes and co-sponsored today's Security Council resolution 2225 (2015), which adds abductions to the criteria for including responsible parties in the Secretary-General's report. The unanimous adoption of this resolution is an important step in enhancing the international community's ability to face this alarming trend and to bring perpetrators to justice. However, much more

needs to be done to further strengthen international efforts to protect children in armed conflicts.

It is imperative to ensure that children are able to grow up in a safe environment, free from exploitation, abuse and any form of violence. In that connection we strongly encourage all States to sign, ratify and fully implement the international human rights framework for the protection of children, including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

In Greece, by virtue of national legislation in 2011, the recruitment of children in armed conflicts constitutes a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and is punished as such by the national judicial system with at least 10 years of imprisonment. In addition, the competent Greek authorities are currently elaborating an action plan on the rights of the child, which has a distinct chapter on children and armed conflict. More specifically, an awareness-raising campaign in schools is being developed, to be launched with a view to organizing information seminars on the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Furthermore, Greece was among the 39 countries that joined the Safe Schools Declaration in Oslo on 29 May, which calls upon parties to an armed conflict to avoid using educational buildings for military purposes or making them targets of attack. We believe that the Safe Schools Declaration provides a concrete way for countries to commit to protecting children's education, even during armed conflict.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that we remain committed to effectively ensuring respect for and protection of the fundamental rights of children as a crucial guarantee for the future of our societies. My country fully subscribes to the need to intensify international and regional efforts to strengthen cooperation in putting an end to the grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict around the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): I will start by thanking the Malaysian presidency of the Council for convening this debate, which provides us with an opportunity to continue our fruitful debate from March (see S/PV.7414), when we were glad to contribute concrete proposals for dealing with non-State armed groups and their consistent and grave violations of children's rights.

Croatia aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union and welcomes the adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) this morning, which we were glad to sponsor.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409) and to acknowledge the existing list of persistent violators as a useful tool against those responsible for committing crimes against children. We fully support the report's recommendations.

Croatia welcomes in particular all the efforts of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, who intensively and tirelessly advocates for the rights and well-being of children affected by armed conflict across the globe. Her active engagement in a case-by-case approach has significantly contributed to the integration of child protection into a number of peacemaking activities. While there are no new parties listed in the report, in our view her role is indisputable and must be further strengthened.

We share the concern of the Secretary-General about egregious violations to which children were subjected during the reporting period, encompassing also those children who were detained under the suspicion of being associated with extremist groups. In that regard, we have to be more than clear — it is better to say "adamant" — that those children have to be treated primarily as victims and not as perpetrators.

Violations committed against children during armed conflict are today, more than ever, part of the changing nature of the armed-conflict landscape. We are continuously witnessing grave violations of children's rights committed by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, putting children's lives in danger and robbing them of their childhood. We fully condemn the appalling atrocities committed by Boko Haram, including abductions of girls, as well as sexual abuse and all other acts of cruelty that directly or indirectly affect children.

All of those acts represent grave violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law. However, due to their extreme nature and the scale of threat they pose to citizens, they are also acts of terrorism. In that vein, the real response to

this challenge requires serious and broad international assistance through counter-terrorism measures.

Croatia believes that the mistreatment of children must be addressed decisively and reiterates its support for the inclusion of abduction among the listing criteria in our efforts to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. Furthermore, let me once again add our voice to those demanding that all perpetrators must be brought to justice, for which we cannot adequately stress the importance of significantly strengthening the role of domestic courts. However, it is also of the utmost importance that the Security Council refer cases of serious crimes to the International Criminal Court, in accordance with its supplementary role and with due regard to the fact that children are specifically protected by the Rome Statute.

Croatia fully supports the campaign "Children, Not Soldiers" and its aim to end and prevent recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces in conflict by 2016. In that regard, we welcome the results recently achieved in Myanmar and Chad.

We would also like to use this opportunity to call on all countries to become party to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as to support the efforts of Somalia to join the family of the parties to that Convention.

The issue of the protection of children during armed conflict needs to remain on the agenda of this body, with the goal of preventing further child recruitment as well as to fully reintegrate former child soldiers. In that regard, we note the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which continues to actively contribute to the mission and vision for a world without child soldiers and without child abuse in times of conflict.

We pledge here today our full and unequivocal support to finally bridging the gap between the commitments towards and the actual practice of ensuring childhoods free from fear and violence.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Nguyen Phuong Nga (Viet Nam): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 10 member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and my own country, Viet Nam.

I congratulate you, Madam President, on Malaysia's assumption of the Council presidency and its chairmanship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. It is indeed a pleasure to see a fellow ASEAN member steering the work of the Council. We also commend Malaysia's initiative to hold this important debate on children and armed conflict. We are grateful to the Secretary-General, his Special Representative and the other briefers for their comprehensive statements and briefings.

Last year saw unprecedented challenges to the protection of tens of millions of children in countries affected by conflicts. Children continue to suffer the most, especially given the unparalleled rise of violent extremism. As the Secretary-General states in his report (S/2015/409), it is an affront to our humanity.

ASEAN is particularly alarmed by the rise in abduction as a tactic of war. In conflicts across regions, major armed terrorist groups are now increasingly employing the abduction of children as a means to terrorize and indoctrinate and, most worryingly, to sustain themselves. We therefore commend the Malaysian presidency for its efforts towards the Council's adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) today, to strengthen measures for protecting children in armed conflict, including steps to address the issue of the abduction of children. The resolution also stresses the importance of strengthening national capacities in providing protection and relief to all children affected by armed conflict.

ASEAN shares the view that a comprehensive approach is needed to protect children in armed conflict, particularly in addressing the issue of abduction.

While stressing the primary responsibility and authority of States, ASEAN once again emphasizes the need to address the root causes of the hardships that children must bear in situations of armed conflict. It is also equally important that the Council and the international community continue their efforts to address the impacts of armed conflict on children.

ASEAN believes that the inclusion of abduction as an additional criterion for listing in the annexes of the Secretary-General's report could help strengthen mechanisms for monitoring violations against children.

ASEAN also believes that prudence must be exercised so as to avoid unnecessarily complicating issues on the ground, especially in situations not on the agenda of the Council. All listing efforts should be objective and comprehensive. They should be based on credible and impartial information, take into account the efforts made by Member States, and be in line with the responsibility and authority of States.

Furthermore, in implementing the mechanism and action plans already in place, it is important that all the relevant actors are properly informed and coordinated. Children's alleged associations with extremist groups should not be reason to deprive them of liberty. Parties concerned should also refrain from military actions if risks to children are associated with such actions.

The Council should also continue to take a cooperative approach and provide necessary assistance to relevant parties that are cooperating with the United Nations through the implementation of action plans to end grave violation against children in armed conflicts.

In our region, ASEAN has been stepping up efforts to tackle issues that children are faced with, at both the national and the regional levels, as well as in institutional and practical areas. In 2015, ASEAN's priority is to strengthen its regional mechanism in order to give effect to the high-level commitment to make progress on this issue. The ASEAN Commission for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women and Children is now developing a regional plan of action for the implementation of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Children, as adopted at the twenty-third ASEAN Summit in 2014, including through regional outreach activities. ASEAN has also consulted and cooperated closely with United Nations agencies and mechanisms, including UNICEF and the Secretary-General's Special Representatives on related issues.

Much remains to be done, yet there are grounds for optimism. It goes without saying that since the first time the Council substantively addressed the issue of children and armed conflict (see S/PRST/1998/18), the international community has made great strides in reducing the suffering that children have to bear in conflict situations. Awareness on this acute issue has been raised; institutions have been established; criteria put forth and initiatives launched and implemented.

ASEAN remains strongly committed to addressing issues that children are facing, especially in conflict situations. Let us work closely together to ensure a better future for children, to make sure that children are not soldiers and not among those who suffer, because children are our common future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Alhakim (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate the delegation of Malaysia on its assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month. I also wish to pay tribute to the Mission of Lithuania for its excellent stewardship of the Council's work last month. I would also like to say how much my country's delegation appreciates the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409), which has been presented to the Council.

We fully align ourselves with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the League of Arab States. We also congratulate all Muslims on the celebration of Ramadan.

A simple glance at the issues debated in the Council concerning Iraq — the direct threat to international peace and security, the threats to Iraq's national unity and stability, the humanitarian crisis, the issue of foreign terrorist fighters and the violations of the rights of women — leads us to note that all of those phenomenons stem from one single source, namely, terrorism. The Council and the international community can bear witness to the fact that Iraq is under threat because of Daesh. We are all unanimous in recognizing that as an international problem, because there is an international coalition that supports Iraq in its efforts to combat that international terrorist organization, which is putting the region and even the entire world at risk.

Today we are addressing the issue of the protection of children in armed conflicts. Regardless of the reality — there are no actual conflicts in Iraq, because there are no warring parties — Iraq is suffering from the scourge of international terrorism, which is affecting all of its citizens. The crimes committed by Daesh fall under the six categories of the grave violations identified by the Security Council, namely, the killing and maiming of children, the recruitment and use of children as soldiers, sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and hospitals, the denial of humanitarian assistance and the abduction of children. Daesh has also carried out the displacement of and

trafficking in Iraqi children in the regions under its control.

My country's delegation would like to make the following comments concerning the portion relating to Iraq in the report of the Secretary-General. My country's delegation subscribes to the report's finding that underscores the exacerbation of the level of violence in my country beginning in the second half of 2014. There was, indeed, during that period an unprecedented increase in accidents and security incidents and violence targeting civilians in general and children in particular, owing to the barbaric attacks perpetrated against a large portion of my country by the Daesh terrorist organization, especially after Daesh occupied the city of Mosul and other Iraqi cities and towns. Daesh has committed the worst crimes and attacks against Iraqi children, which has reached alarming levels in their cruelty and criminality and can be classified as crimes against humanity, in accordance with the reports drafted by the competent international bodies.

Daesh has also targeted the educational sector in many ways. It has closed many schools and put them to use for their criminal ends. It has also changed the educational curriculum by adding subject matter that fuels hatred and incites violence and extremism and terrorism so as to influence the beliefs and values of children through miseducation and prepare them to accept terrorist and extremist ideas with a view to creating a new generation of terrorists and murderers.

Daesh recruits children by force to commit acts of war in the service of that terrorist organization by carrying out widespread brainwashing operations in order to use children at a later point for suicide attacks and in other acts of war and terrorist acts. Beyond the above-mentioned crimes, the attacks by Daesh against peaceful Iraqi cities have led to the greatest wave of internal displacement that Iraq has ever experienced, as civilians have fled the terrorist cruelty of Daesh. That has increased the suffering of children in Iraq, who have become displaced persons and have been deprived of their education and a peaceful life in their cities.

The Government of my country affirms its appreciation for the role played by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and its role in monitoring of the situation of children in armed conflict and protecting them from the horrors of war. However, we would like to express our reservations concerning certain paragraphs in the report that do not faithfully reflect the current reality in Iraq and that weaken the international front of solidarity aimed at combatting terrorism, as they lack precision and objectivity. In fact, we have sent an official letter in that regard to the Under-Secretary-General.

The Iraqi Government, has done its best, within its resource constraints, to ensure the protection of children and to promote their rights. The Iraqi law on military service punishes anyone who uses children under 18 in the military for any reason, because this deprives them of their childhood. We would like to underscore that three days ago, the Iraqi entity that deals with issues related to children, under the leadership of Mr. Haider Al Abadi, held a conference with broad participation at the regional and international levels, including the United Nations and other international organizations involved with children, on the protection of children. The conference focused on the need to move children far away from conflict zones and to prevent their recruitment in Iraq, highlighting the forced recruitment of children by Daesh in the areas that they control. Iraq also extended an official invitation to Ms. Leila Zerrougui to attend the meeting.

To conclude, my delegation would like to reaffirm that Iraq is currently the victim of the most horrific attacks that this society has ever seen. Daesh is seeking to change human values, thoughts and ideas to make them extremist and barbaric, thereby victimizing all of society. It is also trying to put an end to all of the national and regional relationships on which Iraqi society has always been based, as peaceful coexistence was always its fundamental pillar.

We would therefore ask the international community to support all of the segments of Iraqi society in foiling these barbaric attacks, so that Iraqi children can return to their families and live in dignity.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Percaya (Indonesia): Let me first thank Malaysia for having convened this open debate and express my delegation's warm welcome to His Excellency Dato Sri Anifah Aman, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia. We also thank the Secretary-General and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, along with the Deputy Executive

Director of UNICEF and the Director of Facilitation for Peace and Development, for their presentations.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of Viet Nam, on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and that to be made later by the representative of Kuwait, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

We have listened attentively to all of the presentations made here in the Security Council today. Clearly, children should never have to be the victims, or bear the burden, of a conflict that they did not create or choose to be part of. With no power to escape, many children have been taken away forcefully from their families and communities by State or non-State actors and placed in life-threatening situations. It is a shock to our conscience when we hear that child abduction is being used systematically as a tool of war, with the intention of spreading fear and subduing and humiliating entire communities. Many of these children are forced to become child soldiers. They are also forced to become tactical agents. Girls face a greater risk compared to boys, as they are often specifically targeted for abduction, sexual slavery and forced marriage. Worse yet, girls are abducted for trafficking as well.

In the light of these violations, Indonesia condemns child abduction in armed conflict and is deeply troubled by the increasing number of such cases recently. Indonesia joins the international community in calling for the immediate release of abducted children, without preconditions.

Indonesia also stresses the need for a more vigorous, sustained, coordinated and well-supported endeavour, firmly rooted in international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights law, aimed at protecting children, who are disproportionately affected in armed conflicts, including as victims of abduction. Clearly, the Security Council has a critical role in this undertaking.

Given the present situation, we would like to share some of our views on this issue.

First, it is critical to ensure that the emerging trend of child abduction in armed conflict is not perpetuated. All perpetrators, regardless of their status as State or non-State actors, should be held accountable for gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law. It is imperative that the Security Council and other international organizations take all measures necessary to ensure that parties to armed conflicts simply — I repeat, simply — comply with international humanitarian laws and standards.

Secondly, children associated with armed groups or forces should be first and foremost treated as victims. Efforts should be focused on their effective rehabilitation and reintegration into society. In this regard, any legal process against child soldiers or children associated with armed groups, in our view, should apply strictly a restorative-justice paradigm.

We should also acknowledge that hunger, poverty, discrimination and marginalization may lure children to return to armed conflicts voluntarily. They will become a threat to fragile peace deals when they feel that they are not accepted in society and know nothing but violence as a way of life.

Thirdly, we support the idea of further expanding the normative framework for the protection of children in armed conflict by adding abduction as a criterion for listing those parties that violate international norms.

Fourthly, we support the ongoing movement to strengthen the international framework with a view to preventing the military use of schools during armed conflict. In this regard, we welcome the recent convening of the Oslo Conference on Safe Schools.

Fifthly, we recognize the importance of establishing a mandatory pre-deployment requirement for child-protection training for all countries contributing troops to United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Sixthly and lastly, we believe that the international community, in particular the United Nations, should invest more resources in and devote greater attention to conflict prevention, as this is the best way of protecting children from armed conflict.

In addition, enhanced efforts to strengthen the normative and operational framework for protecting children in armed conflict should be made, even in time of peace, including by building national capacities and institutions and by sensitizing the public at large to the issues. Indonesia will continue to put a high priority on safeguarding children.

In conclusion, it is our collective duty to put an end to the nightmares and the suffering of child victims of armed conflict. Their place is in the peaceful setting of their homes and communities, with other children

in classrooms, and living a carefree childhood without knowing the fear of being abducted.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Uruguay.

Mrs. Carrión (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Uruguay would like to thank and congratulate Malaysia on its assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month and for the presence of its Minister for Foreign Affairs here today. We would also like to echo congratulations to Malaysia on organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict, focused, in particular, on the abduction of children by armed groups and armed forces, and the detention of children accused of having links with armed groups and forces. We welcome the statement by the Secretary-General and the briefings by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF.

Today's debate reasserts the commitment of the Security Council to defend the rights of children and the Council's conviction that there is an urgent need to adopt measures to protect their rights and their lives in view of the recent violations of those rights by armed groups. In that regard, Uruguay expresses its full support for resolution 2225 (2015) adopted today.

For Uruguay, the protection and promotion of human rights, and particularly those of children, are a key priority of our domestic and international policies. That is demonstrated by Uruguay's commitment to the work under way, in particular by the adoption, each year, of resolutions on the rights of the child here in New York and in Geneva, where traditionally we have played an active role, and also by my country's ongoing concern for the unqualified respect for the rights of children — particularly their right to education. We have, accordingly, condemned the use of schools and other education centres for military purposes. In that regard, Uruguay is one of 38 countries that has supported the Safe Schools Declaration. It is essential that States implement the standards of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its additional protocols, as well as other international relevant conventions.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005), which established a monitoring and reporting mechanism to report on this type of violations of children's rights. However, over the past five years, there has been a significant increase in those crimes in countries unable to prevent them. The situation worsened during 2014 with the continuing growth in violence and the participation of armed groups in areas of conflict. I am referring in particular to the Central African Republic, Iraq, Nigeria, Syria, Palestine, South Sudan, Yemen and Afghanistan.

Armed groups now resort to the mass abduction of children with greater ease and frequency. Moreover, the situation has worsened because such groups have not limited themselves merely to the recruitment of children, but also have committed the gravest abuses and most aberrant violations of the rights of the children whom they have abducted. From The statistics provided by the Secretary-General in his annual reports show that between 2002 and 2014 more than 24,420 children were abducted. That should be seen as an approximate number, and it would appear that the actual figure is much greater. Accordingly, we need to obtain more accurate information regarding such cases.

We know that approximately 95 per cent of abductions are carried out by non-State armed groups. Those groups must be fought and eradicated. That is the only solution, given their espousal of extreme violence, which includes, among other abuses, using abducted children as suicide bombers or as human shields; recruiting them as soldiers; and coercing them into work or sexual slavery — all of which is committed barbarously and with total impunity. One need only mention the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria's treatment of girls as currency and in forced marriages.

Despite the legal framework and global tools available to deal with such violence, there is still no effective implementation of those tools in the domestic legislation of countries, as well as a lack of the necessary cooperation at the regional level. There will be no lasting solution until those problems are solved. States must be accountable in their obligation to protect the people under their sovereignty, and we must punish those groups operating within States who are responsible for the serious violations of the human rights of children. Such violations should be considered crimes against humanity and be condemned and punished accordingly. Abductions should serve as a trigger for an adequate response by the international community — including the adoption of sanctions and an increase in cooperation aimed at combating them.

In addition to the situation that we just referred to, the numerous arrests of children for their actual

or alleged membership or association within armed groups are also of utmost concern to the international community. It presents a challenge for Member States and for agencies responsible for protecting children. For my country, combating sexual violence during armed conflict is of the highest priority. As we have mentioned earlier, Uruguay participates in the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo and contributes approximately 1,000 troops for the protection of civilians there. Members of the Joint Protection Teams are used to monitor and address violations of human rights in remote regions. Those peacekeepers collaborate with civil-society associations and provide various types of support, including the supply of food and water, as well as medical care. They also conduct patrols to prevent the rape of women and girls in remote locations.

It is vital that we reinforce the Organization's and the Security Council's actions aimed at confronting the impunity enjoyed by armed groups that are responsible for the abduction of children, and that we improve the legal protection for children, as well as their human rights. Accordingly, my delegation urgently calls for the adoption of appropriate measures, such as sanctions and the improvement of cooperation at the regional level.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Panama.

Ms. Flores Herrera (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to thank Malaysia for presiding over the Security Council this month and for having convened this open debate on an issue of such great importance to the international community as children and armed conflict.

It is of great concern to see the increase in armed conflicts and humanitarian crises throughout the world, conflicts in which boys and girls continue to be used as soldiers. While some have been able to escape the violence with their families, many of them, unfortunately, remain under threat, putting their entire future in jeopardy. Both girls and boys are used as tools of war, and they are exposed to sexual violence, psychological trauma, abduction, recruitment, and other violations of their human rights. For those boys and girls, their hopes for a dignified life by 2030 will not be achieved.

We welcome the initiatives taken by UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund, UN-Women and other United Nations agencies in addressing this issue. In particular, we commend the work of Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, as well as all the other actors involved in implementing the Security Council mandate for the protection of children in armed conflict and in ensuring an effective and comprehensive follow-up to the reporting mechanism.

We must stand firm if we wish to permanently eliminate the recruitment of children in armed conflict. While children have no voice in political conflicts, they have the most to lose. This past week saw the publication of a report by the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, which bears a close connection with the subject at hand. It recommended prohibiting the sending of peacekeeping troops from countries currently on the lists in the Secretary-General's annual reports on children and armed conflict and conflict-related sexual violence, as long as they remain on the list. We believe that the establishment of accountability, the elimination of impunity, and the imposition of prosecution and penalties are important in efforts to proceed against all those who commit violations against children. National justice systems, regional and subregional cooperation and the international community should ensure that such proceedings take place. Political will, the implementation of initiatives to protect children affected by armed conflict and the establishment of protection mechanisms are essential to the prevention of violations against children and the recovery of children affected by armed conflicts, and it is our responsibility as States to play that role.

I am pleased to announce that Panama has taken the decision to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, presented on 29 May at the Oslo Conference on Safe Schools: Protecting Education from Attack, since there are 28 million children in conflict areas today who cannot go to school, and, according to the Conference's 2014 report, "Education under Attack", schools have been attacked in 70 countries. We call on those Member States that have not yet done so to join this initiative. We wish to reiterate our commitment to the global effort to protect students, teachers, schools and universities by supporting the Declaration.

Lastly, we support resolution 2225 (2015) on children and armed conflict, introduced today by the representative of Malaysia under the agenda item, a resolution of which we were a sponsor and which seeks to strengthen efforts to address the abduction of children

in armed conflict. We would reiterate the primary role of States in protecting and assisting all the children concerned. We hope through such tangible efforts to reverse the tragic upward trend in the recruitment of children in armed conflicts and at the same time to focus on ensuring that those children can participate in the reconstruction of their communities and States.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Slovakia.

Mr. Ružička (Slovakia): At the outset, let me thank Malaysia for organizing today's open debate and express my appreciation for the work and dedication of today's briefers, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Ms. Yoka Brandt and Ms. Eunice Apio, not only for their presentations but also for the work they are doing on behalf of children in the most challenging situations imaginable. Slovakia wishes to align itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the European Union. We welcome the adoption of resolution 2225 (2015), which we proudly co-sponsored; it is designed to strengthen efforts to address the abduction of children and to reaffirm measures for the protection of children in armed conflict.

Not long ago, in March, we gathered here in the Security Council Chamber to seek to put an end to what has unfortunately become a daily reality for millions of children in conflict-affected areas (see S/PV.7410). Less than three months later, we are back here discussing the issue again. One could, of course, ask whether twice in three months is not too often. Unfortunately, it is not. As stated in the Secretary-General's recently published report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409),

> "There were unprecedented challenges in 2014 with regard to the protection of tens of millions of children growing up in situations affected by conflict ... Mass abductions of civilians, including children, have become an increasingly prevalent feature of conflict in many situations ... The abduction of children had primarily been a precursor to other violations, such as killing and maiming, recruitment and use, or sexual violence".

That is the unfortunate reality, 10 years after the Security Council adopted its resolution 1612 (2005), on children and armed conflict, and now the topic has become a regular item on the Council agenda.

Allow me to point out another area of concern: terrorism and violent extremism. That threat to children has at least three dimensions. First, children have become deliberate targets, often subjected to extreme violence ranging from sexual abuse and forced marriage to kidnappings and brutal killings. Secondly, they have become weapons, made to fight alongside armed groups and at times used as human bombs. Twenty-seven suicide attacks were reported in the first five months of this year, and it is an even more tragic fact that women and children carried out three quarters of those attacks. Thirdly, many children have become trapped in the web of terrorist narratives. It is the younger generation that most actively uses the Internet and social networks. At the same time, it is the Internet and social media that serve to spread such narratives and lure young people into the ranks of terrorists and violent extremists.

Our response must be strong, targeted and comprehensive. We must continuously focus on children and teenagers. We must approach them at a very early stage in a manner with which they are familiar and using language they understand — and they most certainly do not understand the language of bureaucracy, especially not that of international bureaucracy. We must give them genuine prospects for their future and banish the false dreams of terrorist propaganda, which very often turn into nightmares.

I would like to point out four areas on which to concentrate in order to improve the situation of children in armed conflict. The first is peacekeeping and child protection. Let me highlight the critical importance of providing military, police and civilian peacekeepers with adequate pre-deployment and in-mission training on mission-specific child-protection issues. Priority should be given to combating all types and forms of sexual violence committed against children. The inclusion of child protection in the training of peacekeepers, the mandates of crisis-management operations, standard operating procedures and rules of engagement should be mandatory for all uniformed and civilian peacekeeping personnel.

The second area is the restoration of justice and security. That is a key aspect of post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding. Countries in post-conflict development must, with the help of the international community, take concrete steps to address the restoration of justice and security, and demonstrate their commitment to the rule of law and to the vital democratic principle of civilian

control of the armed and security forces. Among many other factors, properly tailored security-sector reforms affect the safety and security of children and youth. In its resolution 2143 (2014) on children and armed conflict, the Security Council expressed the clear conviction that "the protection of children in armed conflict should be an important aspect of any comprehensive strategy to resolve conflict and build peace".

The third area is the establishment of child-protection units in national security forces. We must go far beyond a zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse in such forces. Units should be trained how to address child and youth issues in the traumatic post-conflict period.

The fourth area is education and communication. In order to raise young people who are resistant to extremist ideologies, we should handle our communication strategies better and implement "educate-to-tolerate" curricula so as to form a generation that will view social diversity as a natural environment to live in.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Kabentayev (Kazakhstan): I thank the presidency of Malaysia for drawing attention to the need to protect children from violence, abuse, detention and, in particular, forced disappearance and abduction during armed conflicts, all of which assumed unprecedented and alarming proportions last year. My delegation commends the Security Council and its Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for their attention to and progress in reducing the number of war crimes against children.

As the horror and frequency of such crimes intensify, however, with ever larger numbers of children becoming victims, it is imperative that we respond more speedily than we have done so far, both to new, emerging crises and to protracted, worsening conflicts. Kazakhstan is a staunch supporter of and committed to the rigorous implementation of international humanitarian, human-rights and criminal law, and would therefore like to present the following points for consideration.

First, the issue of children in armed conflict needs to be better integrated into the Council's country-specific work, and a child-protection mandate must be incorporated into all peacekeeping missions, with an officer delegated for that purpose. Such a directive can be effective only if troops, police and civilian personnel on the ground receive adequate orientation, as well as prior training in their home countries before deployment. Our efforts would have better results if there were greater coordination between the Security Council, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and the regional structures and United Nations country teams on the ground.

All Member States should endorse and implement UNICEF's "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, for, as Human Rights Watch estimates, nearly 300,000 children are serving as child soldiers for Government forces and rebel groups in armed conflicts around the world. Statistics also indicate that as many as 70 per cent of the soldiers in some armed groups are children, with girls also recruited, though mainly as sex slaves. The abduction of children should therefore be added as a new trigger for inclusion in the annexes to the Secretary-General's reports, along with the other four triggers: recruitment, sexual violence, killing and maiming and attacks on schools and hospitals. Furthermore, all perpetrators must be brought to justice through stricter enforcement of the Rome Statutes when countries are unwilling or unable to protect children. Countries that are powerless need regional and international support and capacity-building on several fronts, including the military, the promotion of good governance and the rule of law.

My delegation applauds the work of the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and other human rights defenders of children and endorses the proposals they have made, i.e., recommending that the Secretary-General include in the annexes to his report those actors in a conflict who engage in abductions of children, and that all parties to a conflict should treat children as victims, ensuring first of all their full treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Furthermore, every effort should be made to prevent attacks on educational institutions and end the military use of schools; that requires calling on conflicting parties to uphold the Oslo Safe Schools Declaration. There must also be a greater concerted effort to hold security-sector actors in conflict zones accountable for effectively protecting children and to ensure that the United Nations national action plans are adopted.

In conclusion, Kazakhstan, in upholding the rights and dignity of the child, will join the international community in supporting the safe and secure protection

of children, who are the most vulnerable group of all in armed conflicts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines.

Ms. Yparraguirre (Philippines): The Philippines congratulates Malaysia on its assumption of the presidency of the Council this month and appreciates its initiative in organizing today's debate on children and armed conflict.

The Philippines aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

As a manifestation of the steadfast commitment of the Philippines to the protection of children, especially in situations of armed conflict, our Government continues to take steps in that area with the cooperation and support of various agencies in Government, civil society and our partners in the United Nations system. Last year, after 40 years of bloody conflict and 16 years of a difficult peace process, the Government concluded peace negotiations with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and signed a comprehensive agreement on the Bangsamoro. Draft legislation designed to become the legal framework and governing law for the new Bangsamoro entity is now under consideration in the Philippine Congress. Last Tuesday we implemented the first phase of the decommissioning of MILF combatants and their firearms. With those confidence-building developments, we now have lasting peace in the southern Philippines within our grasp, so that our children may wake each day and end each day in a safe and peaceful environment whether they are at home, at play or at school.

Council members will recall that in 2009 the MILF signed a United Nations action plan aimed at addressing the issue of the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces' recruitment and use of child soldiers. That agreement was renewed in 2013, and UNICEF's child-protection specialist based in the southern Philippines remains confident that the MILF will continue to cooperate in order to secure its removal from the list of groups that exploit children in armed conflict. UNICEF has also completed its orientation and training on child rights across 31 MILF base commands and seven front commands in Mindanao for Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces commanders and troops. We hope that the second phase of the action plan, which seeks to implement a communication campaign, will get under way soon. Other activities under the action plan, such as ensuring the United Nations unhindered access for verification purposes and separating former MILF combatants found to be under 18 years of age, will also continue.

In his report (S/2015/409), the Secretary-General notes a decline in cases of child-soldier recruitment in the Philippines, from 20 in 2013 to seven in 2014. The Philippine Government is continuing to work hard to bring that number down to zero. On behalf of the armed forces of the Philippines, it has submitted a strategic plan on preventing and responding to grave children's rights violations in situations of armed conflict, as well as a draft circular on child protection during armed conflict situations. It has also issued guidelines for the conduct of activities by the armed forces of the Philippines inside or within the premises of schools and hospitals.

In that context, the Department of Education of the Philippines has implemented its guidelines on the protection of children during armed conflict by requiring school heads, as well as teaching and non-teaching personnel, to report within 24 hours any information about or incident of grave child-rights violations to the Council for the Welfare of Children, providing information on the date, time and location of the incident, the name, number, gender and age of the children affected and the armed groups involved. We have also established an inter-agency committee on children in armed conflict, which serves as a monitoring, reporting and response system on grave child-rights violations in situations of armed conflict. The team works with the United Nations Development Programme as part of the technical working group of the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting grave child-rights violations in armed conflicts.

The Philippines remains committed to keeping our children safe and will continue to engage and cooperate with all stakeholders in the prevention of grave child-rights violations, as well as in monitoring, reporting and responding to such violations committed in the context of armed conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Laram (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by thanking Malaysia for focusing

its presidency of the Council on the suffering of the millions of children affected by conflict, and for its efforts as Chair of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. I would like to thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia for presiding over today's debate and participating in it. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF and the Director of the Facilitation for Peace and Development organization for their valuable participation. We align ourselves with the statements delivered on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Group of Arab States. We commend the Council's adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) on children and armed conflict, of which Qatar was a sponsor.

Despite all relevant Council initiatives and resolutions, the Secretary-General's recent annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409) highlights the fact that 2014 witnessed unprecedented challenges with regard to the protection of tens of millions of children who are growing up in areas affected by conflict and where mass abductions of children have become a prominent feature. The documentation of human rights violations during conflicts is important. However, such documentation will not be as beneficial as it should be if it is not complemented by the enforcement of laws and by intensive, comprehensive and coordinated efforts to prevent future violations and to achieve accountability.

My country believes in the importance of education, which can have a positive impact on children's sound upbringing, free from extremism or violence. For that reason, during times of crisis, we have placed the utmost importance on the education of children, an interest that has been materialized in the establishment of our Education Above All foundation, which is Qatar's global initiative to provide educational opportunities to societies that suffer from poverty and conflict. The foundation's programmes include an international initiative, Educate a Child, implemented in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which aims to provide high-quality primary-school education to children all over the world and to empower children in conflict areas. We actively participated in the Oslo Conference on Safe Schools: Protecting Education from Attack, held in May. We also supported the Oslo Declaration on Safe Schools, out of our belief that education is of the utmost importance, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which stipulates that everyone has the right to education.

We reiterate the call to continue to prevent attacks against schools and to put an end to their use for military purposes, in accordance with the provisions of international humanitarian law, human rights law and the relevant Council resolutions. We commend the important role of the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack in its efforts to develop guidelines for protecting schools and universities from being used for military purposes during armed conflicts.

The Secretary-General's annual report highlights the grave violations against children in various parts of the world resulting from attacks by warring parties. We are especially concerned about the violations against children in the occupied Palestinian Arab territories and in Syria, which are detailed in the report. Children will continue to suffer and be victimized if the international community does not resolve those conflicts. In that regard, all parties that perpetrate such violations must be held accountable, so that we can end the loss of children's lives and provide reparations to victims.

In conclusion, the world has realized that building safe and stable societies and achieving security and civility in the world must begin with protecting and providing children with a sound and safe environment. Hence, we are facing a test of our ability to honour and implement the international conventions and instruments adopted by the international community if we really want to maintain international security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Hassan (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to reiterate our congratulations to Malaysia on its presidency of the Security Council for this month. Madam President, we know that Malaysia has all the requisite qualities to conduct a debate on this issue, namely, the fate of children in armed conflict. Furthermore, my country's delegation would like to pay tribute to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF for their briefings. We also pay tribute to the Malaysian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Anifah Aman.

The Sudan aligns itself with the statement made on behalf of the Arab States. We welcome the fact that resolution 2225 (2015), adopted this morning, mandates that those parties responsible for abductions are to be listed in the annex of future annual reports of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

The rights of children are a priority for the Sudanese Government. Proof can be seen in the Government's measures and progressive steps, of which I would like to cite a few examples.

First, in terms of our international commitments, my country's Government has ratified the optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child — the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. My Government has also ratified the two relevant Conventions of the International Labour Organization related to children, No. 182 of 1999, on the worst forms of child labour, and No. 138 of 1973, on the minimum age for admission to employment and work. We supported and took part in the ceremony that launched the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign on the issue of children and armed conflict, organized by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UNICEF.

Secondly, in our national legislation, the code for the police, the security forces and the armed forces prohibits the recruitment of those under the age of 18. We also have a justice system for young people, and a 2010 law that deals with child employment. A number of measures in the justice system cover minors. In regard to the mechanisms for the protection of children, the Sudanese Government has established a special unit within the armed forces to protect children.

Thirdly, in the Ministry of the Interior, we have established a National Council for Child Welfare. The Prosecutor General is responsible for dealing with crimes committed in Darfur, for instance, and has acted on all allegations since 2003, particularly the violations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, we have established a commission on the recruitment of children in the Darfur and Blue Nile provinces. In July 2014, we developed a 10-year plan to promote and protect the rights of the child in the Sudan.

Fourthly, in terms of our cooperation with United Nations agencies responsible for the rights of the child, the Sudanese Government, through its Permanent Mission to the United Nations, remains in contact with the Offices of the Under-Secretary-General, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, and UNICEF when dealing with concerns regarding children. My Government is continuing its efforts to promote the status of children. The National Council for Child Welfare in the Sudan has established a national coordination committee and a task force on the status of children in emergency situations, which deals with all issues related to children. Among the committee's mandates is the protection of children in emergency situations and the coordination of issues with UNICEF and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

In that regard, the National Council for Child Welfare in the Sudan organized a seminar on national cultures and their impact on the protection of children, particularly with regard to the recruitment of children in armed conflicts. Furthermore, the various players in that area are striving to complete the final work plan on the protection of children in armed conflicts. In the light of those policies and the specific steps we have taken with regard to children, we call for the Sudan to be removed from the listing in the annex to the latest report of the Secretary-General on the situation of children in armed conflict.

I would like here to categorically refute and reject the contents of paragraph 183 of that report, which contains errors that lead to confusion. The paragraph is based on naive accusations that were broadcast by Radio Dabanga about the village of Thabit last October. We categorically reject that information. We would like to remind members of the Council of the documentary evidence that has been presented in that regard and which should put an end to those lies once and for all. Those accusations were very naive and superficial lies. No one with the least experience in the traditions of those nomadic and rural communities could believe such erroneous information. Members will recall that that radio station is simply a source of lies and is used as a tool by the armed groups that reject peace, with its headquarters in the Netherlands. UNAMID visited the area and issued a report in November 2014 that refuted the allegations. We wish, therefore, for this newer information to be reflected in the Secretary-General's report, because the Secretary-General's reports to the Council must be based on correct, verified information and not on rumours. Furthermore, there is no link whatsoever between that information and the mandate

of Ms. Zerrougui. The same information appeared in the Secretary-General's report on sexual violence (S/2015/203), which was submitted to the Security Council in April. That constitutes duplication, because there are two offices presenting separate reports on the same issue, both of which were submitted to the Security Council. So, is that not duplication?

There are also contradictions in the report. I am speaking here of paragraph 174. Although there has been no new case of recruitment by the Sudanese Army, the United Nations received reliable reports indicating that the Popular Defence Force was recruiting and using children; however, the Popular Defence Force referred to in that paragraph has now become an integral part of the Sudanese Armed Forces, and they assume the same responsibility as our armed forces. That has been the case for years. It is not a new fact. Furthermore, eyewitnesses suggest that 15- to 17-year-old boys are present in the rapid-response force in Nyala. So our question is whether any eyewitness could precisely determine the age of the individuals participating. According to paragraph 184, schools were damaged or destroyed. Eight attacks were pointed out. But the report does not detail where those alleged incidents took place, or whether they were carried out by rebel groups with which members are familiar and which were described in detail in the Secretary-General's latest report on Darfur (S/2015/378).

In order to adopt a comprehensive approach with respect to children, we urge that the following measures be taken. First of all, we must help countries affected by conflict put an end to such conflicts, and we must convince or force rebel forces to lay down their weapons and to participate actively and seriously in the political settlement process. We must also tackle the underlying causes of the recruitment of children into armed forces and the various root causes that led to the conflicts themselves. Secondly, we must deal with causes such as poverty and climate change, we must end the unilateral sanctions against certain countries, we must write off the external debt of developing countries and provide them with technical assistance, we must ensure capacity-building in terms of education and health care, and we must also help such countries to rebuild. Thirdly, it is not enough for the rebel groups to sign various plans to combat the recruitment of children. We must condemn the acts of those rebel groups and force them to disarm and participate in the negotiation process. Fourthly, Governments must be able to take part in all efforts to deal with children and armed conflict, based on respect for national sovereignty and transparency.

To conclude, the delegation of the Sudan reasserts its commitment to work with the United Nations agencies dealing with children and armed conflict, but we call for the Secretary-General's reports to be based on verified and true information. They should not use confusing words with variable geometry. Finally, we call on all information or allegations to be shared with the Permanent Mission to the United Nations of the country concerned and with the Government before they are included in the Secretary-General's reports and submitted to the Council.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Georgia.

Mr. Makharoblishvili (Georgia): At the outset, allow me to thank the Malaysian presidency for organizing this open debate on children and armed conflict, and to further thank Dato Sri Anifah Aman, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, for presiding over today's meeting.

Let me also thank Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Yoka Brandt, Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, and Ms. Eunice Apio, Director of the Facilitation for Peace and Development organization, for their comprehensive briefings and thoughtful analyses.

We applaud the efforts of the Malaysian presidency on behalf of resolution 2225 (2015) adopted today, of which Georgia was a sponsor.

My country fully aligns itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union. I would like to add a few remarks in my national capacity.

The Secretary-General states in his latest annual report on the item before us: "There were unprecedented challenges in 2014 with regard to the protection of tens of millions of children growing up in situations affected by conflict". (S/2015/409, para.5) To our dismay, that is today's reality. UNICEF called 2014 "a devastating year for children, with as many as 15 million caught in conflicts in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Ukraine".

We believe that the Council should address this important issue more actively and resolutely, because

we face an ever-increasing trend of violence against children in both conflict and non-conflict situations, including violence committed by non-State actors.

Despite broad understanding of the nature of the problem and despite the numerous efforts at the regional and international levels to address them, we have yet to see tangible progress on the ground. Children continue to be abducted in armed-conflict situations, recruited as combatants, and boys and girls continue to fall victim to acts of violence, murder, maiming and arbitrary detention committed by parties to conflict across the globe. Boko Haram's abduction of hundreds of women and girls in Chibok and the kidnappings in Syria and Iraq committed by Daesh are glaring examples of the types of gross violations to which children are subjected in armed conflicts. The areas controlled by non-State actors and terrorist groups, as well as territories under foreign occupation, are zones of grave risk for children, with imminent threats to their lives by actors who operate in total disregard for internationally recognized legal norms.

Let me use this opportunity to reiterate that the issue of child protection is of great importance for Georgia. Our Government spares no effort to ensure adequate living conditions for children affected by internal displacement. Such measures include expanding social and education assistance programmes and implementing a comprehensive national strategy. Unfortunately, my Government has been deprived of the opportunity to address the humanitarian needs of children affected by conflict who live in regions that remain under illegal Russian military occupation. We are extremely concerned that fundamental human rights continue to be violated on a daily basis. That becomes especially disturbing considering the absence of international monitoring mechanisms inside the occupied regions of Georgia. Children residing in the Tskhinvali and Abkhazia regions are deprived of minimal safeguards for the protection of their rights, as envisioned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Georgian children living under foreign occupation are being prevented from exercising their fundamental right to education in their mother tongue, which is guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Freedom of movement is also severely restricted for Georgian children living under occupation. The intensive process of the installation of barbed-wire fences and embankments along the occupation line in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions significantly affects the livelihoods of the local population, including those of children. Russian military forces do not allow schoolchildren to cross the occupation line to attend classes on the territory controlled by the Georgian Government. On a number of tragic occasions, even people seeking medical care have died en route to the hospital after being denied passage across the dividing line. We fear that the so-called integration treaties recently signed by the Russian Federation with the aforementioned Georgian regions will cause further deterioration in the living conditions of the families residing inside the occupied territories.

We once again call on the Russian Federation to respect the fundamental principles of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and other legal instruments within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as well as the provisions of the August 2008 ceasefire agreement between Georgia and Russia.

We have a common responsibility to strengthen our efforts to protect children in armed conflict. We need to take concrete and tangible steps to alleviate the consequences of armed hostilities for new generations and safeguard their rights and freedoms. For its part, Georgia stands ready to contribute to concerted international efforts and to help ensure more effective protection of the population caught up in armed conflict or in post-conflict situations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Munir (Pakistan): We are honoured by the presence among us of the Foreign Minister of Malaysia this morning. We value the remarks by the Secretary-General and the briefing by his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

During the year under review, existing challenges of child recruitment and abuse were exacerbated by the mass abduction of children from schools and communities. Those horrendous and barbarous acts were committed by non-State actors, who use such tactics to terrorize societies. It is our hope that the unanimous adoption today of resolution 2225 (2015) will help address the worrying trend of abductions of children in situations of armed conflict.

Peacekeeping missions, where so mandated, can play an important role. To effectively accomplish that, they must receive the necessary training and the requisite resources. As one of the largest troop-contributing countries, Pakistan welcomes focused pre-deployment and in-mission training in that regard.

It is also important that persistent perpetrators of violence against children be identified and brought to justice through national judicial systems. To that end, investigative and prosecution capacities should be strengthened at all levels.

The year 2014 was a grim one for the hapless children of occupied Palestine. The 50-day military invasion of Gaza left 550 Palestinian children dead and more than 4,000 injured. Images of children killed on a beach in Gaza are still fresh in our minds. Yet they have conveniently been described as "accidental" by an Israeli inquiry. The international community could not stop that massacre, and with no accountability in sight, its non-recurrence cannot be guaranteed. Pakistan is concerned about the selective approach to the listing adopted for this year's report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409). It amounts to condoning the grave crimes committed against Palestinian children. Such an approach not only damages the credibility of the mandate, it also sets a bad precedent for the future. The international community must not shy away from listing those involved in grave crimes against children in situations of armed conflict.

The recruitment and use of children in conflict is a horrendous crime. The Security Council's efforts over the past 16 years have produced significant results. The commendable work done by the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which Malaysia currently chairs, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General's Children, Not Soldiers campaign, have also greatly helped. Thousands of children have been demobilized, rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. Yet the job is far from accomplished. We have to redouble our efforts to fully achieve its goals by the target date of 2016.

The scourge of child recruitment and other grave crimes against children cannot be fully countered without addressing the root causes of armed conflict. Conflict resolution and conflict prevention must receive due attention from the Security Council and the international community. We welcome the focus of the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations on this aspect.

Finally, we would like to stress once again that the legal parameters of the mandate of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict established by Security Council resolutions must be fully respected. Our focus must remain on situations of armed conflict. In that context, we want to state for the record that references to Pakistan in the report are not within the purview of the established mandate.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Al-Otaibi (Kuwait): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Malaysia on its presidency of the Security Council for this month and to welcome the convening of this open debate of vital importance for the protection and well-being of children in conflict by His Excellency Dato Sri Anifah Aman, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.

We deeply appreciate the role played by Malaysia, the Chair of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The adoption today of resolution 2225 (2015), which includes abductions as an additional violation whereby parties engaging in abduction will be listed in the annexes of the Security Council's annual report, is a step forward towards ending this grave violation committed against children in contravention of international law.

I have the honour to deliver the following statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in my capacity as Chair of the OIC Group.

The OIC Group has carefully reviewed the report of the Secretary General on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409). We would like to express our profound appreciation for the efforts made in the preparation of the report and the role played by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in identifying the cases that fall within the scope of her mandate. They highlight the situations of children growing up in areas affected by conflict, in particular, as mentioned in the report, those children in several countries affected by major crises — Israel, the State of Palestine, the Central African Republic, Syria, South Sudan, Iraq and Nigeria.

Despite all that, the report excludes Israel from its annexes of parties committing grave violations against children in armed conflict, which, regrettably,

contradicts the legitimate recommendation of the impartial and evidence-based report, naming Israel as a grave violator of children's human rights. Such a decision will not only put United Nations integrity and credibility at stake, it also further emboldens Israel, in terms of impunity, to continue committing its flagrant and systematic violations of human rights, which have been persistently carried out with total disrespect for international law and disregard for the lives and rights of the Palestinian people, including children. The Group is therefore deeply disappointed by that deplorable decision.

The OIC believes that the 2015 annual report on children and armed conflict, prepared by Ms. Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, constitutes a credible instrument, among other documents, for identifying and illustrating Israel's innumerable violations, perpetrated mainly against Palestinian children. In that regard, the OIC reaffirms the need for it to remain committed to the substantive mandate of the United Nations Office and to serve as a leading United Nations advocate for strengthening the rule of law and ensuring the protection and well-being of children, as enshrined in international conventions and human rights standards.

In the meantime, the OIC shares concerns over the continuing crimes committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people, including children, who have been enduring severe violations that are not limited merely to murder, arrest, interrogation and torture, but include the destruction of their education, recreation and health facilities, among other things.

There is no need to recall that the human rights indicators for Palestinian children, who compose 53 per cent of the total population, have deteriorated sharply as a result of the latest Israeli military offensive — in summer 2014 — which left more than 550 children dead and 3,370 injured, more than 1,000 of whom were left permanently disabled, as well as at least 370,000 children, according to reports of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, who require specialized psychological support. Furthermore, the devastating impact of Israel's restrictions on movement by way of checkpoints, the apartheid wall and the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip have worsened the rising poverty, isolation, despair and deprivation that scores of Palestinian children have been experiencing at an alarming rate.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation reiterates its call on the international community, particularly the Security Council, to uphold its responsibility to avert the deteriorating situation in Palestine and to ensure justice and protection for the rights of the vulnerable Palestinian children and the integrity of efforts to provide a political horizon for moving forward. That will help to empower the Palestinian people to regain their inalienable rights and provide hope, at a time of widespread desperation, to the new generations of Palestinians that their legitimate aspirations to a future free of abuse and violence will be achieved.

The OIC Group expresses its profound concern with regard to the negative impact of armed conflict on children, including the recruitment and use of children in conflict, mass abductions of children, sexual violence committed against them, their killing and maiming and attacks on schools and hospitals committed by various actors. The international community should respond to threats to peace and security in full compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law.

In that regard, we greatly value the Special Representative's initiatives to include child-protection provisions in peace negotiations and agreements, and her "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign aimed at ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children by the end of 2016. We welcome Chad's full compliance with the measures detailed in its action plan as the first country to be delisted from the annexes to last year's Secretary-General's report (see S/2014/339, para. 217).

In conclusion, although wars and armed conflict affect society as a whole — men, women and children alike — children are the most vulnerable and the most in need of our protection; they are the hope of the future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cambodia.

Mr. Tuy (Cambodia): Allow me to express my congratulations to Malaysia on assuming the presidency of the Council this month and to thank it for having organized this very important meeting. My delegation would also like to thank the Secretary-General for the preparation of the annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409) and his tireless efforts in working to improve the situation of children worldwide.

Before I deliver my national statement, I should say that my delegation would like to associate itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

We share the concerns expressed by many delegations about the difficult situation that millions of children face as a result of armed conflicts, and we would like to emphasize the importance of the debate for children who are victims of non-State armed groups. Violence against children and attacks on their welfare are on the rise globally and are well documented. Abductions, rape, torture, slavery, attacks on schools and the use of children as combatants, suicide bombers and executioners cannot be tolerated by the international community.

Cambodia strongly condemns all forms of violence perpetrated against children. My delegation is deeply concerned about the increasing trend of abductions of children by non-State armed groups. The Secretary-General's report notes accurately that this practice serves as "a precursor to other violations, such as killing and maiming, recruitment and use, or sexual violence"; moreover, abduction is used as "a tactic to terrorize or target particular ethnic groups or religious communities" (S/2015/409, para. 6) The international community must devote close attention to that disturbing terrorist tactic, which is used to dehumanize, humiliate and subjugate entire populations, particularly women and children.

As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a signatory to its 2000 Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, Cambodia supports United Nations initiatives aimed at protecting children in conflict.

The primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security rests with the United Nations, and we, as the international community, must assert the rule of law. We must strengthen existing legal instruments on the protection of children in armed conflict. To that end, we welcome the efforts of the Malaysian delegation to include abduction as an additional violation triggering inclusion of a party within the annexes of the Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict.

Children are the future; they are the future of our progress and our civilization's development. Children deserve to be raised in nurturing environments without experiencing the physical and psychological trauma of armed conflict.

In that light, I reiterate my delegation's longstanding position that in order to protect children from violence, slavery and the everyday horrors of war, we must address the deep-rooted causes of conflict. Conflict prevention is a prerequisite for sustainable peace and respect for human rights. Poverty, discrimination, lack of education, social exclusion and inequality only perpetuate the cycle of violence.

Preventing the use of children in armed conflict can be achieved only through the creation of adequate social, political and economic conditions worldwide. We must take careful note of that, because no sustainable development agenda can be successfully applied without first securing a safe and prosperous future for our children.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the Royal Government of Cambodia is resolved to protect children and their rights in situations of armed conflict. We are committed to working with our global partners, States Members of the United Nations and United Nations agencies in our efforts to end the victimization of children by non-State armed groups. It is only by working together that we can ensure that future generations of children can live free and in peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Eler (Turkey): I would like to start by thanking the Malaysian presidency for convening this open debate on children and armed conflict. We welcome the adoption earlier today of resolution 2225 (2015), of which Turkey was a sponsor.

As underlined in the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409), the year 2014 saw unprecedented challenges for millions of children growing up in countries affected by conflict. The increased momentum achieved by the tireless efforts of Special Representative Zerrougui has paved the way for tangible progress. The groundbreaking "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, led by her Office, deserves unflagging support. Nevertheless, there remain significant shortcomings in protecting children in armed conflicts that require focused attention from the international community.

Unfortunately, with the changing nature of conflicts, acts such as mass abductions, torture and

sexual violence, attacks on schools and hospitals, limited access to even the most basic humanitarian requirements and wide-scale displacement have immense and disproportionate effects on children. Several of the conflicts we face today in various geographic locations have revealed the increasing involvement of non-State armed groups in violating even the basic rights of children. The appalling crimes committed by terrorist organizations, such as Daesh and Boko Haram, must be highlighted in that regard.

Moreover, the Secretary-General's report outlines the dire situation of Palestinian children, who face unacceptable violations that contravene international law. As many delegations have already expressed today, in the light of the violations committed against Palestinian children, the list contained in the annex of the Secretary-General's report is incomplete without due reference thereto. We agree with the observations highlighted in the statement recently delivered by the representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

A display of joint and robust political determination, as well as concerted action, is our most crucial tool for addressing the issue of children and armed conflict. The efforts of the United Nations to provide essential assistance to children, as well as monitoring and reporting functions that facilitate better planning, protection and response, should be supported. The continued implementation of the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeeping operations remains crucial. Furthermore, the decision to include parties that engage in patterns of abduction of children in situations of armed conflict in the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General sends a strong message to those who perpetrate such unacceptable acts.

As we try to identify tools that we can use to put pressure on non-State armed groups to prevent any recruitment or use of children on their part, we should bear in mind that signing documents with such actors can lead to exploitation of the issue and encourage them to use such documents as a means of propaganda in order to claim legitimacy. We therefore believe that all international organizations and non-governmental organizations should refrain from drawing up any kind of document, including in the form of so-called deeds of commitment, with terrorist organizations. Instead, reinforcing the legal framework for the prevention and punishment of the recruiting activities of terrorist organizations should be the priority.

I will refrain from taking up the Council's valuable time to respond to certain baseless accusations made by the representative of the Syrian regime, which we categorically reject. We are with the Syrian people, and we stand by them. Our engagement and assistance take place in the sight of the international community and in close cooperation with international organizations, including United Nations agencies.

The report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict once again revealed the saddening deterioration of the situation of children in Syria, just across our border. In fact, as the crisis enters its fifth year, a generation of young Syrians faces the danger of being lost to a cycle of violence. I would like to share some figures with the Council to make the picture clear for all of us. According to UNICEF, 7.3 million children are directly affected by the conflict in Syria. Of those, 3.5 million have become internally displaced persons, and 5.9 million children inside Syria need aid. Moreover, 3.5 million children are out of school owing to the conflict. There are 323,000 children below the age of 5 who are either under siege or in locations that are very difficult to reach. In addition, 2 million Syrian children have fled to neighbouring countries.

Despite all of the challenges, Turkey has pursued an open-door policy for Syrians fleeing their country without any discrimination based on religion or ethnic origin. Approximately 260,000 Syrians are being accommodated in 25 temporary protection centres in Turkey. In addition, more than 1.5 million Syrians continue to live outside those centres in various cities in Turkey. We cannot overemphasize the fact that children are among the most vulnerable groups in this crisis situation. We are extending every possible form of help to meet the growing needs of Syrian children, especially in the fields of education and health care. There are more than 550,000 school-age Syrian children in Turkey. Around 70,000 are being educated in classrooms at temporary protection centres. Outside those centres are almost 480,000 children who need education. Emphasis needs to be placed on creating more classrooms and education opportunities for those children, with the help of the international community.

The most recent clashes in and around Tel Abyad, which is situated right across from our Akçakale border crossing, are a source of grave concern. They

have triggered a new influx of displaced people into Turkey. The forced displacement of the Arab and Turkoman populations of the northern regions of Syria is unacceptable and is bound to further deepen the crisis in Syria. In fact, we informed the Security Council and the Secretary-General of the situation in a letter dated 14 June.

In conclusion, I would like to underline Turkey's unwavering support for all international and regional efforts related to the protection of children.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Malaysia on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for this month, and I align Egypt's statement with that delivered by the Permanent Representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. We take note of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/409) and commend Ms. Leila Zerrougui for a job well done in preparing the report. We also congratulate Chad on having been delisted from the 2014 report and on its full compliance with its action plan. We call on the parties currently on the list to exert greater efforts to ensure their delisting from the coming report.

The Security Council's resolutions provide the United Nations and the international community with tools for effectively addressing the six grave violations against children in armed conflict, starting with the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict and ending with the creation of the Security Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. Despite the pivotal role those tools play in protecting children in armed conflict and ending the impunity of perpetrators, there are some persistent challenges to their achievement of their full potential in that task.

This year's report succeeded in enlightening us with regard to the heinous violations committed against children all over the world, including those committed in Syria, Iraq and Africa by terrorist groups such as Daesh, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Boko Haram. Regrettably, however, it failed to make its annexes fully reflective of the facts stated in the report. According to the mandate given to the Secretary-General, any party that commits one or more of the six violations against children should be listed in the annexes to the report. The aim of that listing is to start a dialogue with the listed parties on the development of concrete, time-bound action plans to halt and prevent violations against children.

According to the report, Israel is believed to have been involved in three of the six grave violations by killing Palestinian children, targeting schools and hospitals, and denying humanitarian access to the Palestinian people. However, Israel was not listed in the annexes to the report. According to another report (S/2014/650) of the Secretary-General, on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, at least 2,104 Palestinians have reportedly been killed, including at least 495 children. In that context, we are against preferential treatment being granted to any party, since that would constitute an apparent case of double standards. In that regard, Egypt calls on the Secretariat to rectify that deficiency in the next report.

This year, as we celebrate the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005) and the first anniversary of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, we should fulfil our commitments to protecting innocent children in armed conflicts and refrain from any action that could exacerbate their suffering.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Zimbabwe.

Mr. Shava (Zimbabwe): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 15 States members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Allow me to welcome and thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia for presiding over this important debate. I also wish to express gratitude to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui; and other briefers for their invaluable presentations this morning.

This debate comes at a critical time in the maintenance of international peace and security, with the current upsurge in violence attributed largely to non-State actors. Tens of thousands of children have not only been displaced and separated from their families but also recruited, maimed, killed or forced to kill. The horrific videos released by the Islamic State in Iraq and Sham (ISIS) showing a young boy executing a captive and a teenage suicide bomber bear testimony to the extent of the grave violations committed against children who are forced to commit despicable acts of violence.

As we mark the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which established the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, this debate is a significant step in assessing the progress achieved so far on combating grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. This year also marks the first anniversary of the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, which was launched in March 2014 by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict along with UNICEF, which is aimed at preventing the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. SADC believes that the campaign's primary goal of achieving child-free Government armed forces in conflict by 2016 is attainable.

A significant number of children affected by conflict live on the African continent. In an effort to protect children affected by armed conflict, the African Union has ensured that child-protection concerns are central elements of the peace and security of the continent. Strengthening cooperation among its member States and subregional organizations with a view to improving child protection remains a priority of the African Union. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which came into force in November 1999, addresses the issue of child soldiers. In its article 22.2, it states that:

> "States Parties to the present Charter shall take all necessary measures to ensure that no child shall take a direct part in hostilities and refrain in particular from recruiting any child".

At the subregional level, most SADC member States have signed and ratified international child-rights-protection instruments and have enacted various legislative measures to give effect to them. The provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and other instruments provide us with guidelines on how to address the protection of children in armed conflict. SADC believes that strengthening the cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations would enhance the protection of children in armed conflict.

As the African continent and its subregions continue to play important and significant roles in the continent's mediation, conflict-resolution and peacebuilding processes, it is imperative to make that partnership stronger in order to confront the complex emerging challenges emanating from the proliferation of armed gangs and extremist groups. An example of this cooperation is the joint action taken by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in freeing child soldiers from the grip of armed groups. In South Sudan, the Democratic Movement/Army-Cobra Faction has released 1,757 children since January 2015 to UNICEF and its partners.

While significant progress has been made in achieving child-free Government armed forces, it must be noted that Governments are not the only recruiters of children. The current increase in the proliferation of non-State armed groups poses a great threat to the protection of children. The heinous acts committed by Boko Haram and ISIS highlight the increasing violence perpetrated through abductions, killings and the instilling and perpetuating of extremist ideology in societies through indoctrination.

Recruitment is not the only danger to which children are exposed. Violations and abuses against children in armed conflict take many other forms, including sexual slavery, human trafficking and involvement in suicide bombings.

SADC strongly condemns attacks on schools and hospitals, which deprive children of the right to education and health. Those who commit atrocities against children must be held accountable for their actions. Children's rights to education and health must be guaranteed, and the Security Council must condemn equally firmly such violations, wherever in the world they occur. We must redouble our efforts to protect children and to respect their rights in time of war as in time of peace. The international community must confront decisively the devastating impact of armed conflicts on children in the many regions of the world where they are occurring. In this context, the whole range of tools available should be used to exert pressure on both States and non-State armed groups in order to end and prevent grave violations of children's rights in situations of conflict.

SADC also believes that in order to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict, the United Nations and regional organizations should secure a commitment from parties to conflicts to promote child protection in the context of political dialogue during peace talks. Mainstreaming the

protection of children's rights in final peace agreements would go a long way towards promoting children's rights.

We underscore the need to build local and regional capacities, particularly in the judiciary, to deal with perpetrators of violence against children. Holding perpetrators accountable helps to prevent impunity for the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. Accountability requires instituting legal measures to criminalize violence against children.

In conclusion, SADC wishes once again to underscore the necessity of conflict prevention and the need to tackle its root causes, including the ethnic, religious, social and economic factors that facilitate the recruitment of children by non-State armed groups. The trauma experienced by children during armed conflict affects them for the long term and can contribute to recurring cycles of violence if left unattended. It is therefore vital to reintegrate and rehabilitate the children in those areas so as to ensure that they receive the medical, psychological, educational and economic support they need to rebuild their lives and realize their full potential.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Auza (Holy See): At the outset, my delegation wishes to congratulate Malaysia on its presidency of the Council this month and in particular for scheduling this debate on children and armed conflict. One of the saddest developments in the evolution of armed conflict is that increasing numbers of victims are civilians. In the early 1900s, approximately 5 per cent of fatalities were civilians, whereas in the 1990s the percentage was over 90, including a large children. While a disproportionate number of children are killed and injured in conflicts, countless others grow up with their material and emotional needs unmet. The entire fabric of life and society is torn, as homes, schools, health systems and religious institutions are no longer safe from attacks and military operations. Indeed, those institutions have become frequent targets in armed conflicts.

The year 2014 has been proclaimed the worst ever for children affected by armed conflict. An estimated 230 million children currently live in areas affected by such conflicts, and new levels of violence have been inflicted on them through their use as suicide bombers and human shields. The Secretary-General's annual report (S/2015/409) on children and armed conflict provides a horror list of the forms of violence to which children were subjected in 2014: they were killed, maimed, abducted, enslaved, recruited as soldiers, displaced, trafficked and sexually abused. We can safely affirm that never in recent memory have so many children been subjected to such brutality.

It is very important to highlight the issue of the abduction of children in armed conflict, because it is often the gateway to more serious abuses against children and graver violations of international humanitarian law. The 24 April 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls by Boko Haram exemplifies the horrors of that specific crime and highlights the added challenges involved in bringing non-State armed and terrorist groups to justice and into compliance with national and international human-rights laws, especially as they relate to child-protection obligations.

There has been progress in combating violence against children in armed conflict. The "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign has strengthened the commitment of the Governments concerned. The Council has focused its efforts and resources on that question on numerous occasions. However, the gap between legislation and implementation remains very wide and the emergence of new challenges requires new tools. My delegation therefore believes that we must strengthen our response to the crime of abduction and its trail of further crimes against children in armed conflict. We believe the Council can and must do still more. My delegation has prepared a five-point recommendation for consideration, and we are pleased that several of its points are already contained in resolution 2225 (2015), which has just been adopted.

First, specific child-protection commitments aimed at the rapid release of children from armed forces and armed groups should be incorporated into peacebuilding efforts. Accordingly, the Council should consider expanding resolution 1612 (2005) to include abduction as an additional issue to be specifically monitored in peacekeeping operations.

Secondly, considering the increase in the number of cases of abduction, the Holy See notes with satisfaction that in accordance with the resolution adopted today, the Security Council requests the Secretary-General to include, in the annexes to his annual report on children and armed conflict, those parties to conflicts that engage in the abduction of children.

Thirdly, the care and rehabilitation of children who have been rescued from armed groups must be backed by adequate and long-term resources in order to ensure as far as is possible the children's successful reintegration into their families and into society and that they do not remain hostages to the horrors they have survived.

Fourthly, putting an end to impunity must be a key part of the healing process, as well as a deterrent for future potential perpetrators.

Fifthly, the prohibition against using schools, hospitals and other institutions for children for military purposes and armed attacks must be strictly implemented and those practices condemned in the strongest possible terms. The Holy See is therefore pleased that that too is strongly stated in the resolution adopted today.

I would like to assure the Council that the Holy See and the Catholic Church, in general, have been and continue to be actively engaged in providing specialized support to child victims, including many forms of trauma-healing services and reconciliation with families. I wish to mention, in particular, the Saint Monica's Centre in Gulu, Uganda, which has dedicated itself for many years to the rehabilitation of child victims of the Lord's Resistance Army; there are many similar institutions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well. Numerous initiatives have been launched to raise public awareness of this plague and help child victims reunite with their families.

In areas of armed conflict, we have noted that faith communities have demonstrated that they are an essential element in the recovery and reintegration of child victims into normal life. In addition, faith communities are a key part of an early-warning system for preventing abductions.

Horrendous as they are, the crimes committed against children in armed conflict are but one manifestation of a violent world. We must combat all forms of violence, especially those that breed crimes against children in armed conflict, and we must not cease to foster an education that promotes peaceful and harmonious co-existence among peoples.

The Holy See therefore exhorts the international community and the Council, in particular, to engage in more vigorous diplomacy in order to put an end to all the situations of violence that rob so many children of their present and future. The protection of children is a serious moral and legal obligation. To protect children in armed conflict from all forms of violence is to protect our future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Montenegro.

Mr. Perović (Montenegro): We thank you, Mr. President, for having convened today's debate on children and armed conflict, and we commend Malaysia's strong commitment to the issue during its term on the Council. I would also like to thank today's briefers for their presentations and their important work on the issue.

Montenegro aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union. I would like, however, to highlight some points of particular importance to my country.

We are witnessing the dramatic consequences of the violence affecting 230 million children in the world owing to the evolving character of contemporary conflicts. Heinous crimes are being committed, with an alarming rise in abductions, especially the mass abductions of children that have taken place in Syria, Iraq, Nigeria and South Sudan. The issue of children and armed conflict is a global one that requires an urgent and collective response, and the adoption of today's resolution 2225 (2015) is a step forward in advancing the agenda of children and armed conflict.

This year marks the first anniversary of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which is aimed at ending the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces in conflict by 2016. That is an ambitious undertaking that requires working together and sharing our expertise and resources in order to end child recruitment in the next two years. The example of Chad proves that action plans can work. We call on all parties, States and non-State actors that have not concluded action plans to follow the example of Chad, and we call on those that have signed to honour their commitments in full. In that regard, we would like to stress that Member States must enable United Nations personnel to gain access to areas controlled by armed non-State actors in order to end violations there, as well as to conclude and implement action plans.

We see the increasing and worrying trend of attacks on schools and their use for military purposes, as well as the abduction and detention of children, which we

find alarming. At the same time, we must be aware that the consequences of such attacks go beyond the destruction of schools. They concern the future of an entire generation, a future without hope that will only sow the seeds of further conflict. We therefore welcome the emphasis in resolution 2143 (2014) on concerns regarding the military use of schools, and would like to take this opportunity to call on all parties to armed conflict to refrain from such use. In that regard, we also welcome the adoption today of resolution 2225 (2015) and the addition of abduction as a new trigger for the listing of parties to conflict in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (see S/2015/409). Such addition will enhance our ability to hold perpetrators to account.

More, however, needs to be done. The International Criminal Court (ICC) and national judicial authorities have an important role to play in responding to violations as they occur. It is also vital that the Security Council make use whenever possible of the option of referring situations to the ICC, and that the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict should further consider means of increasing pressure on persistent perpetrators of human rights violations and putting an end to impunity.

With regard to United Nations peacekeeping and political missions and the indispensable role they play, Montenegro would like to advocate for the incorporation of a strong child-protection component in the missions' mandates. Such incorporation would require that peacekeepers and military and security personnel receive specialized pre-deployment training on child protection.

Montenegro remains committed to our noble joint objectives and to rising to the challenge of providing the world's children with a safer future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Myanmar.

Mr. Lwin (Myanmar): Our delegation would like to congratulate Malaysia on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council and the chairmanship of the Council's Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his opening remarks. We also thank Ms. Leila Zerrougui, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and the other briefers for their presentations. Myanmar also aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Viet Nam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

My delegation fully shares the international community's concern regarding the increase in the number of grave violations committed against children in armed conflicts in many parts of the world. The decision to focus today on the abduction of children is also very timely and relevant, since we are witnessing a disturbing new trend in abductions, used mainly by non-State actors for their purposes. There is no doubt that in an insecure environment children are most vulnerable to the serious consequences of armed conflicts.

Myanmar has always fully supported the search for a sustainable solution able to protect innocent children from the effects of armed conflicts. We have also supported the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, launched last year to end the recruitment and use of children by Government armed forces by 2016. We are encouraged by the steady progress made in the first year of the campaign. Six of the seven countries that continue to recruit and use children have cooperated with the United Nations by signing and recommitting to action plans to end and prevent such recruitment. The Security Council must therefore take a cooperative rather than a punitive approach to this sensitive issue in the case of the parties cooperating with the United Nations.

My own country, Myanmar, is indeed one of the countries actively engaging with the United Nations to address the matter. Since our action plan was signed in June 2012, Myanmar has honoured its commitments by taking a series of measures in regular consultation with the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting and the central committee for the prevention of the military recruitment of underage children of the Ministry of Defence of Myanmar. The action plan has been extended twice, each time for six months. Over 35 monitoring visits to regional commands and regiments have been conducted. Nationwide awareness-raising campaigns to combat the recruitment and use of minors have been launched. Over 12,000 members of the armed forces have received training on the action plan. Almost all of the steps outlined in the plan, including the issuance of orders prohibiting underage recruitment, the verification of ages, the identification and release of underage recruits, their reintegration into society and the punishment of offenders, have

been taken. The increase in the number of complaints can be attributed to such factors as growing awareness, greater freedom of expression and the repeated filing of similar complaints. The recruitment of children under 18 is strictly prohibited under the existing regulations. Any such complaints would relate to crimes perpetrated by individuals rather than to the policy of the armed forces.

Some of the information in the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409) has been overtaken by recent developments in Myanmar. On 4 June, the Government armed forces discharged a further 51 children from military service after verification of their ages. Since the action plan was signed in 2012, a total of 645 underage children have been discharged from military service and have been reunited with their families. In accordance with the Joint Strategy for the Elimination of Forced Labour, signed by Myanmar and the International Labour Organization (ILO), a directive criminalizing forced recruitments has been issued. A total of 327 perpetrators, including 50 officers and 277 other ranks, have been punished for the wrongful recruitment of minors. Since June last year, recruitment centres rather than infantry units have been solely responsible for recruitment, and more supporting personal documentation has been required of new recruits so that their age can be verified and forgery prevented. The Supplementary Understanding signed by Myanmar and the ILO has also effectively prevented action against underage recruits as deserters from the armed forces.

My delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict for rightly reflecting in his report some of the positive measures taken by Myanmar. At the same time, the Government has been making every effort to sign a nationwide ceasefire agreement with the ethnic armed groups to end the conflicts in the country, which have lasted over six decades. The ending of armed conflicts will eradicate the suffering caused by violence against innocent children.

In conclusion, my delegation is also pleased to inform the Security Council that an invitation has been extended to Ms. Leila Zerrougui, the Secretary-General's Special Representative, to visit Myanmar and hold consultations for the further advancement of the work plan. We are looking forward to welcoming her to Myanmar soon, so that we can remove the remaining obstacles to reaching the common goal of ending the recruitment and use of children in the Government armed forces by 2016.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Fathalla, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations.

Mr. Fathalla (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): To begin with, I would like to congratulate the Republic of Malaysia on its presidency of the Security Council for this month. We wish Malaysia every success and are grateful for its convening of this important meeting on the topic of children and armed conflict.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his report, contained in document S/2015/409, which the League of Arab States considers extremely important. However, we would have wished the report to be clearer in naming those responsible for grave violations against Palestinian children in its annexes. We hope that today's meeting can help to produce a comprehensive vision for strengthening efforts to protect children during armed conflict, and, most importantly, to ensure that they are not forced to participate in conflicts, whether as part of regular Government armed forces or non-State armed groups.

Our region has found itself in exceptional circumstances in recent years, with many children in Arab States, particularly Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Libya and Yemen, living in very difficult conditions. That has made the members of the League of Arab States more determined than ever to continue to take the route of implementing international agreements and instruments concerning children and preventing any form of violence against them. The League believes we must protect children in armed conflict and is therefore actively working to improve its cooperation with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. To that end, the Secretaries-General of the League and the United Nations signed a cooperation agreement on the margins of the high-level segment of the General Assembly at its sixty-ninth session, resulting in a plan of action that includes programmes and activities aimed at protecting children affected by conflict and strengthening their rights. The activities include a high-level forum to be held on the margins of the Arab Summit scheduled for March 2016. At that time we will launch a comprehensive Arab strategy for protecting children affected by armed conflict and reintegrating them into society.

I would like to shed some light on various facts cited in the Secretary-General's report relating to grave violations against Palestinian children living under Israeli occupation. First, the percentage of deaths among Palestinian children is the third highest in the world; an average of 10 Palestinian children are killed every day, and more than 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza are suffering under occupation and have been collectively punished as a result of the blockade imposed on Gaza since 2007. That has harmed the more than 80 per cent of families in Gaza that rely on humanitarian assistance, on top of the destruction in 2014 of at least 543 Palestinian schools. All of that has an impact on Palestinian children and on the possibility that they can be nurtured and grow to be good citizens in a safe society.

Concerning the situation of children in Gaza, there must be serious and sincere efforts made to rebuild the Gaza Strip and guarantee children their basic right to live in dignity and safety. There must be accountability for crimes and grave violations of international humanitarian law. Children need to be able to live in dignity and safety, and when we talk about grave violations of international humanitarian and human-rights law, we are also talking about violations of the four Geneva Conventions and the other international instruments that guarantee the safety and security of peoples living under occupation.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the support of the League of Arab States for the work of Ms. Leila Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, regarding the promotion and protection of the rights of children affected by such conflict. The League supports the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign launched last year by Ms. Zerrougui with a view to ending by 2016 the recruitment and use of children by any Government armed forces, and we are working and cooperating with the United Nations to persuade three Arab States to respond positively to the campaign, leaving all Arab States free of that dangerous phenomenon as well as of children's participation in wars and armed conflict. We welcome the efforts being made to end child recruitment by Government forces and we are establishing various frameworks for cooperation in achieving that noble goal. However, we should also focus on the violations committed by non-State armed groups against children, since most of the parties listed in the annexes to the Secretary-General's report are non-State actors. We must stand together to face this danger to international peace and security, and that is the primary responsibility of the Security Council.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Botswana.

Ms. Mogobe (Botswana): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Malaysia's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council, and to offer our continued support for the Council's work.

Botswana aligns itself with the statement delivered a short while ago by the representative of Zimbabwe on behalf of the Southern African Development Community.

My delegation is grateful to you, Mr. President, for organizing this important and highly relevant debate, which comes at a critical juncture in our history, as violent conflict continues to escalate at unprecedented speed across the regions of the world. We are also grateful for the panelists' insightful briefings today, which have given us the opportunity to more fully appreciate the risks and dangers faced by children affected by armed conflict. Those conflicts have also taken on an alarmingly insidious character, increasingly targeting innocent civilians and subjecting them to unspeakable acts of terror and an assortment of types of exploitation and abuse. The rise in non-State actors involved in such conflicts further complicates their already complex nature.

The threat to international peace and security posed by those developments is as real today as it ever was, and it requires that the Council act urgently and decisively to address it. Chief among the Council's objectives as it does so must be ensuring the protection and promotion of the rights of children everywhere, including in armed conflict, and to enable the creation of an environment conducive to effective and timely responses to the unparalleled humanitarian crises we are seeing in many parts of the world.

We have taken solemn note of the Secretary-General's latest report on this subject (S/2015/409), which highlights the fact that children affected by major crises are being exposed to the most shocking kinds of violations. Botswana is deeply concerned about the gravity of such evolving violations against children, including abductions, which have been occurring recently at a startling rate. The report shows

that whereas in the past mass abductions of civilians, including children in conflict situations, were largely a means to an end, today they are also an end in themselves, with the prime objective of inflicting terror.

It is altogether unacceptable that children are employed as mere tools or objects in war and terror. They are being robbed of their innocence and their childhood by being forcibly removed from their communities, recruited into armies to maim and kill — and often maimed and killed themselves — made into human bombs and shields, exposed to sexual violence and other traumatic forms of exploitation and unlawfully detained on suspicion of identifying with this or that group. Needless to say, such situations have devastating consequences for the health and well-being of those children and their families who survive them, as well as of society at large. We thus have a moral duty and obligation, as responsible members of the international community, to ensure that urgent and radical measures are taken to protect children from such grave violations of their rights.

We must guarantee full protection of children's rights, including their ability to attend school without interruption and to enjoy access to all social services that contribute to their development, good health and well-being so that they can realize their full potential. Whatever means the international community finally decides on in pursuit of that noble objective must also ensure the full prosecution and accountability of the perpetrators of such heinous acts. It is also crucial that security personnel, including those in peacekeeping missions, be held accountable for the violations that they commit against the very civilians and children they have the responsibility to protect. Confidence and trust in our troops is a fundamental prerequisite for the success of any peacekeeping mission.

In this year of the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), which created a platform for Council members to conduct a continuous assessment of violations against children affected by armed conflict and to ensure the full implementation of initiatives for their protection, we must be able to demonstrate notable progress in that regard and have the unwavering resolve to further consolidate our efforts. Botswana commends the efforts made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, together with UNICEF, in launching a year ago the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign, which continues to raise awareness of this issue. We are also encouraged by the full Council support for resolution 2225 (2015), adopted earlier today, which we hope will also help address the issue.

In conclusion, Botswana wishes to reaffirm its commitment to all the international conventions to which we are party that protect the rights of children as well as those calling for accountability for perpetrators of gross human rights violations. It is clear that in some States where major conflicts and crises continue to rage, the authorities have manifestly failed in their responsibility to protect civilian populations. It is therefore my country's view that the onus and responsibility for acting lies squarely with the Council and the global community.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Azerbaijan.

Ms. Mammadova (Azerbaijan): On behalf of the delegation of Azerbaijan, I would like to thank the Malaysian presidency for having convened this important and timely debate and for its leadership in advancing the issue of child protection in the Council's work. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his annual report on children and armed conflict (S/2015/409).

Armed conflict and foreign occupation are both the root cause and the result of grave violations against children. The proliferation of non-State armed groups, their easy access to armaments and their increased use of abduction, recruitment and sexual abuse as a tactic of war have contributed to the rise, intensity and brutality of crises, which have emerged as a common challenge related to the protection of children.

Azerbaijan is deeply concerned about the dramatic increase in the number of child casualties and the disproportionate impact of armed conflicts on children's security, safety, health and welfare. We have always been consistent in demanding strict observance by the parties to an armed conflict of their obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, in all circumstances. The vulnerability of children in wartime brings an element of urgency, dedication and strong commitment to worldwide protection efforts, which must be free of selectivity.

During the Armenian aggression against my country, thousands of Azerbaijani children were deprived of their basic rights; thousands of them were killed and maimed on the basis of ethnic hatred or

taken hostage and forcibly displaced from their homes. Armenia's continuing denial of those children's right to return to their homes has social consequences and implications for the possibility of achieving lasting peace. Many of the children and their families have also gone missing, and despite the continued efforts of the Government and the International Committee of the Red Cross, their fates are still unknown. More than 20 years after the signing of the ceasefire agreement, the civilian population and facilities of Azerbaijan have remained subject to targeted and indiscriminate attacks by the Armenian armed forces.

We appreciate the activities of United Nations mechanisms aimed at ensuring more effective protection of the rights of children and improving the situation of children affected by armed conflict, pursuant to resolutions 1379 (2001), 1882 (2009), 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014), and we welcome the progress made in that regard, including the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign. Particular consideration should be given to internally displaced children in terms of ensuring their right to return and the implications of illegal policies in situations of foreign occupation for the protection of children's rights.

We appreciate and commend the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed conflict, Ms. Leila Zerrougui. The fulfilment of the Special Representative's mandate with respect to all situations of armed conflict, including those of a protracted nature, is crucial in that regard.

Efforts to achieve peace cannot be conducted in a manner that contradicts the established norms of international law. It is therefore imperative that such efforts and peace agreements should never encourage the acceptance of situations resulting from the unlawful use of force or other serious violations of international law, such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing. Important steps have been taken in a number of situations of armed conflict to achieve accountability for grave violations against children. However, serious challenges remain. We join the call for more resolute efforts to end impunity and find a long-term and sustained solution for eliminating and preventing illegal practices affecting the rights of children.

I would like to conclude by welcoming the adoption today of resolution 2225 (2015), which demonstrates the Council's continued determination to address the problem in a comprehensive manner, with a focus on the phenomenon of abduction.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Kenya.

Mr. Grignon (Kenya): I thank you, Madam President, for having convened today's debate. Kenya welcomes the global importance and priority that the Security Council and the international community continue to attach to the protection of children affected by or involved in armed conflicts. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report (S/2015/409), which enumerates the grave violations committed against children in armed conflicts, and for impressing on us the urgency of the need for greater protection of our children.

The recruitment of children as weapons of war underlies larger and more systemic issues that include the breakdown of a country's social fabric and imply a long-term generational aspect to the conflict and the possibility of future mass atrocities. We need to address the root causes of conflict, including political, social and economic inequalities. Child protection should be part and parcel of any strategy for managing and preventing conflict. In that regard, we appreciate the progress being made through the monitoring and reporting mechanism and the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict.

Kenya is deeply concerned about the fact that the number of children being recruited or abducted, and even volunteering to take part in armed conflict throughout the world, has escalated to unprecedented levels. Child soldiers are engaged in severe conflicts where there has been evidence of horrific abuse and brutal violence. We call on the Security Council to address this critical issue as a specific priority concern. We note with dismay the current unprecedented challenges presented by the protection of children who are growing up in situations affected by conflict. The subjection of children to reprehensible acts of violence and abuse must move humanity to reimagine the responsibility to protect; it is indeed our collective moral imperative and legal obligation.

In Kenya, the volatile situations in South Sudan, Somalia and, more recently, Yemen are of great concern and present a clear, persistent and continuing threat to our national security. Armed groups such as Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram continue to be emboldened and will not be defeated or discouraged from abducting and

recruiting children by engagement and diplomacy alone. The Security Council and the international community must intercede to save the world's future.

Decades of conflict in our region have resulted in a continued flow of refugees into Kenya. The burden of hosting nearly 600,000 refugees continues to place great strains on the delivery of social services, particularly in education, health and the provision of security. The majority of the refugees are women and children, including ex-soldiers and children involved in armed conflict. The world must not continue to permit children to grow up in refugee camps where they can hardly survive, let alone thrive. We therefore urge the Security Council to spare no effort and to engage robustly with the African Union and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) i seeking solutions to end the conflicts in the affected regions. As the world gathers in September for the United Nations summit to adopt the post-2015 development agenda, the concept of leaving no one behind must be applied to all countries and regions in conflict.

Kenya applauds the launch of the "Children, Not Soldiers" campaign by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF for galvanizing the commitments of eight concerned Governments to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in national security forces by the end of 2016.

We welcome the Secretary-General's call to the Security Council to continue supporting the children and armed conflict agenda by strengthening provisions for the protection of children in all relevant mandates of the United Nations peacekeeping, special political and peacebuilding missions.

We recognize that the most effective way to protect children is to prevent the outbreak of armed conflicts and to prevent conflicts from escalating. In that regard, Kenya is actively involved in seeking ways to end conflicts and find sustainable peace through cooperation with IGAD. Kenya has been at the forefront of initiatives to negotiate for peace in the region. The international community must also urgently and collectively address effective ways to bring the existing conflicts to an end.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Portugal.

Mr. Mendonça e Moura (Portugal): I would like to thank the Malaysian presidency for convening this open debate and thank today's briefers for their presentations.

I would like to offer a special word of thanks to Ms. Leila Zerrougui for the work she has been doing to protect children.

Back in 1998, the first ever debate held in the Security Council on the issue of children in armed conflict was promoted by Portugal. We were then fully convinced, as we remain today, that this issue has serious implications for international peace and security.

It is appalling that the minimum standards in respect for human right in times of war are systematically ignored and violated by both Government forces and non-State actors. When children, the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, continue to be victims of armed violence and are killed, injured, abused, abducted and, in some cases, used as soldiers, that represents the collapse of the collective value system of the international community.

The international community must ensure the application and observance of normative international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, in particular the one on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as the Geneva Conventions.

The political and ethical role of the Security Council is to send a clear message that abuse against children is unacceptable and, through its action, to combat the sense of impunity on the part of belligerents responsible for the atrocities and abuses committed against children.

As stated in the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2015/409), 2014 was one of the worst years with respect to the effects of armed conflict on children. Children have been disproportionately affected and are often direct targets of extreme violence. Abduction in particular has become a tactic of war used by extremist non-State actors to terrorize and control communities, and it is a first sign of alert for further human rights abuses. Portugal condemns in the most vehement terms the abduction of children and calls on all parties to release all abducted children immediately. Portugal welcomes today's adoption of resolution 2225 (2015) and the expansion of the list of triggers for listing

perpetrators in the Secretary-General's annual report to include abduction. The resolution represents a further step in holding perpetrators accountable and in investigating and prosecuting those responsible for committing atrocities against children.

It is of the utmost importance to recognize the importance of action to promote the physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of child victims of conflict. Efforts should include demobilization and the return of displaced and refugee children. The international community must ensure that adequate resources are devoted to child-rehabilitation programmes and educational training as an integral part of planning for post-conflict situations. In addition, any plans for post-conflict peacebuilding should make the needs of children a central focus. In that regard, Portugal supports the inclusion of child-protection provisions in the mandates of peace operations and mandatory pre-deployment training on child protection for all United Nations troop and police contingents. However, before attempting to address the difficult challenge of reintegration in society, it is fundamental that children deprived of their liberty for their alleged association with extremist groups should be recognized, in the first instance, as victims of forcible recruitment who have been exposed to extreme brutality.

The inadequate provision of education to children in situations of armed conflict is also a serious problem that will have consequences in the long term for the countries concerned. Millions of children are denied their right to education because of armed conflict. In his latest report, the Secretary-General notes the increasing trend towards the use of schools for military purposes, as well as attacks on education. We are gravely concerned about widespread and deliberate attacks against schools, teachers and students as an instrument of warfare. That is a totally unacceptable situation that needs to be urgently redressed. My country has regularly introduced a resolution on the realization of the right to education in the Human Rights Council that was at the origin of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education. That resolution, which my delegation will again present atthe current session of the Human Rights Council, as well as related initiatives in the General Assembly, such as the resolution on education in situations of emergency, which my country also sponsored, are steps in the right direction in order to guarantee what is not only, in itself, a fundamental human right, but also an important tool in the fulfilment of other basic rights.

Against that backdrop, Portugal also endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration made public at the recent Oslo conference and calls on the parties to adopt concrete measures to deter the use of schools during conflict, including though the use of tools of the Lucens Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict.

We cannot remain indifferent to the gross violations of children's rights that we are witnessing everywhere. We thank the leadership of Malaysia for its efforts to consolidate the mechanisms at the disposal of the Council for addressing one of the most appalling scourges of our time.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Australia.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Thank you, Madam President, for convening this important debate. I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Special Representative Leila Zerrougui for their efforts to give prominence to the rights and protection of girls and boys affected by armed conflict.

The profound interest we all share in protecting the world's most vulnerable citizens, our children, is evidenced by the fact that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most ratified international human rights treaty in history. Yet still, in conflicts today, children are consistently victimized and denied their most basic protections. For example, in South Sudan, the future of a generation of children is being jeopardized by worsening fighting and severe food insecurity caused by gross political self-interest. Through resolution 2206 (2015), the Security Council established a mechanism to impose discipline on the peace talks through the use of targeted sanctions.

But with no sign that either party is genuinely committed to peace, the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015) should immediately list individuals and entities whose actions target civilians in South Sudan, particularly children. South Sudan is reliant on its children growing up safely and with hope for the future.

We must do more to compel non-State actors to live up to their obligations to protect children in conflict situations. In their persistent targeting of children, barbarous groups such as Daesh and Boko

Haram have demonstrated that their actions are bereft of humanity. Both groups have engaged in systematic child abduction — a heinous crime used to humiliate, suppress and terrorize civilians. Abduction during armed conflict is a serious breach of the rights of children, and the consequences are dire. They can amount to additional crimes: we know that thousands of children have been snatched from their families and forced to be soldiers, sold as sexual slaves, exploited as human shields or as unwitting suicide bombers.

It is for those reasons that the Council has listed child abduction among the six grave violations against children during armed conflict. As we mark the tenth anniversary of resolution 1612 (2005), we welcome the Council's decision today to include abductions as a trigger for the inclusion of parties into the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report (S/2015/409).

Australia commends the work of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. We encourage the Group to engage directly with peacekeeping mission leadership — as it did for the first time last year with the United Nations Mission in South Sudan — and to better understand contemporary challenges on the ground.

In United Nations peacekeeping missions, there must be situation-specific training for all peacekeeping personnel, including military and police, to address the full range of grave violations against children, including abductions. The international community must do more to prevent grave violations against children and to end impunity. Condemnation is not enough. Australia joins others in endorsing Malaysia's Children in Armed Conflict Accountability Framework as a practical resource that can guide States in introducing accountability measures at the local, national, regional and international levels.

As the preamble to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child states, "Mankind owes to the children the best it has to give". That is as true in times of conflict as it is in times of peace. We welcome the Security Council's continued interest in this most important issue.

The President: The representative of Israel has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Shilo (Israel) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, Madam President, to make my statement in Arabic. I do not think this subject should have been debated, but unfortunately there are many places in the world where innocent children have become victims of war and terrorism. It is possible that some of the Missions that have attacked Israel today might have forgotten the meaning of terrorism or perhaps they have become included under this term. There are those who do not know that Hamas is a terrorist organization. Regrettably, however, some regional and Arab leaders have opted to ignore the evils of terrorism and have focused on condemning the State of Israel. Hamas, this terrorist organization, has indiscriminately launched thousands of missiles targeting kindergartens, schools, hospitals and medical centres. However, these missiles have been ignored totally in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/409). Hamas has opened fire from densely populated areas with one, and only one, aim — to kill innocent civilians, including children.

The Missions that have accused and attacked Israel know for a fact that Israel accords importance to protecting the lives of all persons, regardless of their ethnicity, nationality or race. Israel focuses on protecting lives; this has its roots in our traditions and our history. We have not targeted the Palestinians. On the contrary, we are sorry for all the harm they suffered during the conflict in Gaza in 2014. It is regrettable, however, that Hamas is sacrificing its people, including its children, in order to tarnish the image of the State of Israel. The Palestinian Authority should have condemned Hamas for endangering the lives of the citizens. However, instead of doing that, it launched accusations against Israel. Instead of bringing life back to normal in Gaza, it has chosen terrorism.

Let us pray for a time of peace where the children in Ashdod and Gaza can play in the streets without fear. But this will not be achieved unless Hamas and other armed groups give up war and adopt the option of peace.

The President: The representative of the Russian Federation has also asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Khvan (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): In his statement, the representative of Ukraine did not agree with information about the loss of children's lives in south-eastern Ukraine as a result of firing by the Ukrainian military, and accused Russia of having done that. In order to avoid the usual accusations of propaganda, let us look at the report

of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. One need only look at recent reports. The report of 6 June talks about the mission's visit to Telmanove, which was shelled by artillery on 4 June. The mission looked at 13 shell traces; seven of them, they concluded, originated from the west. They also visited the local hospital, where the deputy head doctor said that the shelling had killed a 4-year-old boy in his home. The report of 28 May talks about the artillery shelling of Horlivka on 26 May. According to the mission's assessment, in this case the shells came from the north and north-west. That is where territory is located that is under Kyiv's control. Not only adults but also an 11-year-old girl died, and the monitors concluded that she died because of the shelling. Furthermore, on that day two children were injured, leading to their hospitalization. Mission representatives spoke to the children's mother, who was also wounded. These two localities, Telmanove and Horlivka, are located on territory that is not under the control of the authorities in Kyiv. We do not think that this information needs to be additionally commented upon.

As regards the destruction, a United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report stated that in the Luhansk region, which is not under the control of the Ukrainian Government, about 60 per cent of schools were damaged and five schools destroyed. Nonetheless, according to OCHA the local authorities have managed to ensure that the children are attending school and receiving food.

On the issue of abductions, the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/409) talks about the horrendous abduction of hundreds of children by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria and Boko Haram, as well as the physical violence against them, their sexual enslavement and the ideological propaganda to which they are subjected. Many of the participants in today's meeting have spoken about the importance of putting an end to those crimes.

If the delegation of the Ukraine does not see the difference between these crimes and removing children from an area of armed conflict for medical care, then we have nothing more to say.

We are convinced that those children who were seriously injured, or those who needed, for example, dialysis, which is impossible to provide in many areas, do not consider themselves to have been abducted.

It is also out of place to make such statements against Russia as those made by the representative of Georgia. The root of the problem, in that case, is Georgia's refusal to normalize relations with the newly independent States of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The President: The representative of Ukraine has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Yaremenko (Ukraine): I just want to say a few words. I do not want to, and I do not have to convince everybody present about the fact that in Ukraine, we have been facing Russian aggression for more than a year and a half. There is so much evidence that it is absolutely unnecessary to do so.

The only thing that I would like to say to the Russian Federation is that if we were not forced to deal with the Russian aggression, no Ukrainian children would be harmed. So please, take all of your weapons and money and all of the militias out of our territory and everything will be absolutely fine.

The President: The representative of Georgia has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I give him the floor.

Mr. Kvelashvili (Georgia): I thank the President for allowing my delegation to take the floor for a second time. I am responding to the statement by the Russian Federation, in particular the part of the statement regarding Georgia. I want to repeat the words just spoken by my Ukrainian colleague. Russia just has to do one thing, namely, get out of Georgia and Ukraine. If it leaves our territories, then everything will be fine.

As for the so-called normalization of relations with the occupation regime that Russia established on Georgian soil in 2008, Russia engaged in a war of aggression against Georgia — the same type of war that we now see in Ukraine. After the war of aggression, Russia established an occupation regime. So how can we normalize relations with a regime that is part of a bigger problem, namely, the Russian Federation itself?

Let me also go into more detail about the rights of children under Russian occupation. The Georgian children living under Russian occupation are being prevented from exercising their fundamental rights. In particular, a Russian curriculum is being imposed on the Georgian schools in the occupied territories. Teachers are promised a salary only if they teach according to a curriculum approved by the Russian State. Teachers

that disobey the foreign directives and instruct their students in Georgian are subjected to harassment and prosecution by the occupation regime. That is the reality on the ground — at least part of the reality.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 7.35 p.m.